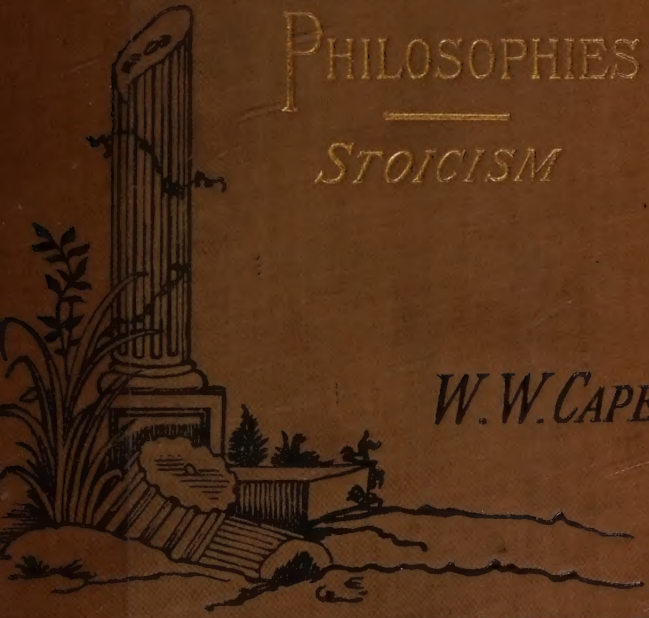
Chief Ancient Philosophies

Stoicism



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CHIEF ANCIENT PHILOSOPHIES.

STOICISM.

BY

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STOICISM.

CHAPTER I.

THE THOUGHT AND CHARACTER OF SOCRATES.

THE study of Stoicism cannot be properly begun without some attempt to trace its germs in earlier speculation, and to note what was the state of Greek society in which it first took root before it was transferred to other and perhaps to kindlier soils. Like all the famous systems which divided the earnest thinkers of the old Greek world, its real starting-point is to be found in the life and thought of Socrates, whose original and striking figure fills so marked a place in the pictures of the social life at Athens towards the close of the fifth century before our era.

Not that Greek philosophy began with him. There had been no lack before of serious efforts to solve some of the many problems which had forced themselves upon men's thoughts when they looked out upon the universe around them, or tried to think about their own relations to the world unseen, and to the infinities that lay before and after. But these earlier seekers after wisdom had no chart or rules by which to steer, had no instruments or method

of discovery, and could make therefore little progress in their course. There was a sublime audacity in the way in which they grappled with great questions, constructed systems of the universe, and explained as they thought the laws of nature, before they had determined the simplest rules of logic, or had any more appliances than the experience of the untrained senses. They were like the early painters who aspired often to portray the imagery of heaven, or to deal with lurid scenes of future judgment, before they had learnt even the rudiments of perspective or anatomy. They gave birth therefore to little more than guess-work, lighted up here and there with flashes of strange insight, that may remind us of the discoveries of later ages; but nothing came of all their subtle thought, for they had no tests by which to disentangle truth from error. There was a want of balance and proportion in their hasty systems which seemed to oscillate from pole to pole. At one time they had only eyes to see the moods and qualities of outward nature, and language seemed to them to bear no higher meaning, and mind and its processes to be but subtler forms of matter. At another time they were so much impressed by the fleeting character of all the knowledge gained through sense, that thought alone seemed sure and solid, while all experience else was treacherous and unreal. There was no practical value in their speculations while they rested on this level. The love of wisdom, which the name philosophy implied, was strong and earnest; it was a natural yearning to explain the mysteries of the world in

which men lived, but it had borne as yet no solid fruits to justify itself to sober sense. It had not furnished men with any rule of action, with any standard of what was right or wrong. It had not helped to train them for the needs of social life; for it had not fitted them to serve their country or to push their fortunes in any of the arts of peace or war. Such had not been its aim indeed; it never had aspired to do such work, but then again it might be urged that little else had yet been gained: no sure knowledge of the world of nature, no full acquaintance with the powers of thought. But while philosophy was dreaming on, disdaining to be man's counseller and guide in common life, another power was ready to step into the vacant place, and to meet all the demands of higher culture. In Sicily, and among the isles of Greece, a class of teachers had arisen, who had made a special study of the arts of speech and forms of language, and all the show of literary graces. They had learnt much of men and manners as they passed from land to land, and were familiar with all the topics of politics and art and morals which had roused the interest of the age. They professed to educate the rising youth for public life, to train them for the fence of words in the national assembly and the law courts, to stock their memory with graceful phrases as well as with the lessons of ripe statecraft. Old-fashioned folks, indeed, might shake their heads and say that the so-called sophists had the show of wisdom, not its substance; that they did not care for truth, but only for effect, and were quite

indifferent to the ends which knowledge should be made to serve. They probably unsettled old convictions by comparing the customs and the laws of different nations, and often ran a tilt at venerable dogmas out of mere bravado or caprice.

It might seem, perhaps, to careless eyes as if Socrates were only one of this new class of professional teachers. Like them he seemed to court men's notice, to live chiefly out of doors, and to be for ever talking to the young men he gathered round him, and to treat often too with scant respect time-honoured customs and beliefs. But unlike them he affected no display, and made no pretensions to superior knowledge; like older thinkers, he was but a seeker after wisdom, with a deeper sense of his own ignorance than the rest; the *irony*, which was so marked a feature of his style, consisted in the humility with which he owned his want of knowledge, in his willingness to hear what others had to say, and in what they thought the captious spirit with which he probed and criticised their answers. But he felt strongly that the ideas of men around him were all loose and hasty and one-sided, not based on any sure experience or careful scrutiny of facts. They were often inconsistent in themselves, or carelessly gathered from imperfect data; a few questions or a few appeals to other cases were enough to show the need of further thought to correct and to complete such notions. Knowledge, he said, was true and real only in so far as it consisted in conceptions in which the class qualities were duly gathered from a

wide experience amply sifted, and all the seeming quibbles of his daily talk were but infinitely varied illustrations of what we call the processes of definition and induction. His was a method of inquiry therefore, but no system really formed; he had no definite theories or body of connected doctrines to be handed on by his disciples, or defended as a sacred trust. So it was that schools of widely different tenets alike owned his influence and revered his name. The same principle and method were applied by all, but led them in some cases to conclusions far apart.

But one feature which they mostly shared was his large interest in moral questions. Socrates is said to have brought down philosophy from heaven to earth; he certainly discouraged for awhile all the ambitious speculations about the universe at large with which the older thinkers were so busy. The one thing of paramount importance in his eyes was the standard of right action; if man is to rule his life aright he must know what is honourable, just, and good; all his efforts must be centred on that knowledge, which alone will give him the virtue of true manhood. Without knowledge there is, he thought, no virtue possible, but only a blind following of custom, authority, or law, or an aimless drifting with caprice or passion. Each, therefore, of the great Socratic schools had its own moral system, and its rule of life; the votaries of wisdom were the men who were most intent to practise virtue; and as religion spoke in heathen days in faltering and misleading accents on such subjects, and in the decline

of Greece the laws and sanctions of the State had daily less of moral force, philosophy stepped into their place and became the "Ductor dubitantium," the guide for the consciences of earnest men.

Another feature of Socratic thought is the high estimate it formed of the dignity of manhood, which was thus to be a law unto itself. A certain divine element was lodged, it seemed, within the soul of man; its future life beyond the grave was probable, though hardly capable of proof. The value of its piety transcended far the worth of any offerings which it could make to God, and in some privileged cases, as of Socrates himself, some superhuman guidance might be vouchsafed, not from without, but from within.

It has been said that the practical importance of these moral speculations grew larger as the purity and binding force of the standards of the State declined, but they tended also in their turn to estrange men in some degree from public life. It is true that Socrates himself spoke in the highest terms of duty to the State and of obedience to its commands. He urged the competent to labour for the common weal, and endured death himself that he might not violate his country's laws. But his political ideal could not agree with the facts of the Greek republics of his day. The statesman's virtue lay in knowledge; that alone, not popular election or haphazard, could confer the right to rule. For the well-being of all an aristocracy of intellect must hold command, but when the masses are in power the upright official cannot secure right

and justice, and will often best consult his dignity by retiring into private life.

Moreover, the whole tone of his teaching, and his critical method of inquiry, well might seem to disparage the common code of morals and the usual rules of conduct which rested on authority or custom. The little Greek republics of old days had done great things by the strong glow of patriotic feeling, and by unshrinking obedience to the national codes of honour. They were troubled by no doubts, but identified alike their interest and duty with the present well-being of the State. But man's virtue now was to consist in the knowledge of right and wrong; his first duty was to follow his convictions; the laws even of his country might be called in question, and feelings towards its enemies be merged in the larger sense of human brotherhood. The martyrdom of Socrates is in itself a symbol of this conflict, a proof that the Greek conscience claimed to direct its own career, free henceforth from all dictation from the State.

But the independence of character which Socrates professed included something more than social freedom. It was not enough to rise above the opinions of the thoughtless crowd, and to cleave at all hazard to the inner sense of right; reasonable self-respect, he thought, could only be maintained by self-control, by such a mastery over the desires that none should assert itself too strongly, or interfere with the pursuit of truth. He did not indeed push matters to extremes, or disparage the natural pleasures of the

senses. There was no ascetic rigour in his conduct such as later moralists have often preached and practised; but in the simplicity of his daily life, in his cheerful abstinence from self-indulgence, in the hardihood with which he bore hunger and thirst and heat and cold, while yet he could truly say that he was thoroughly happy in his moderation, he lived up to his own sense of human dignity, and left a model of philosophic independence which has influenced the whole tone of later thought.

There was no revolt in Socrates against the standards of his age and country, but still it is of interest to note that there were features in him which were certainly not of a Greek type. There was something eccentric in his outer man, an obvious want of harmony between his looks and character which was almost a matter of jest among his friends, and which offended the cultivated taste of Athens. The common current of his talk and the nature of his illustrations hardly were in keeping with the grace and artistic beauty of his times. He took his examples from the commonest subjects, without much regard to prejudice and fashion, and explained the notion of the beautiful as consisting in mere usefulness. He was so sunk at times in meditation as to forget the outer world a while, and the stiffness of his posture at such times was paralleled by a certain want of delicate tact and intellectual sympathy for the feelings of his hearers. This may have weakened perhaps his influence while he lived, but it also may explain some sides of the Socratic thought in the later forms which

it assumed, and which were still less in harmony with the spirit of Greece.

With these remarks, then, we may pass from the method and sentiments of Socrates himself, but the points which have been thus lightly touched on will meet us often at a later stage. The paramount importance thus ascribed to moral questions, the high estimate of human dignity, the estrangement from the business of public life or the protest at its lower rules of action, the ideal of the unruffled calm of self-control, and the partial disregard of the balance and harmony natural to Greece—these were all developed afterwards in various forms, and some of them were pushed to great extremes, but nowhere with such extravagance as by the Cynics.

CHAPTER II.

THE CYNICS.

It was not many years after the death of Socrates before some of the tendencies which have been noticed in his teaching were carried out in their extremest forms, and paraded as a rule of life before the startled eyes of an Athenian public. What we read of them may sound almost like a grotesque parody of the Socratic thought, but they were professed in sober earnestness at first, and lasted on with little change of phrase or argument for at least 500 years, reappearing even afterwards to some extent in Christian dress, and stamping a familiar epithet on every modern language.

The Cynic sect began with Antisthenes, who was of Athenian birth, but the chief champion of that militant philosophy was Diogenes, of Sinope, whose striking figure and bold epigrams filled a far larger space in public fancy. The gymnasia or public halls of the Greek cities were used not only for athletic exercises, but also by the lecturers, rhetoricians, sophists, who found in them a willing audience or a ready market for their literary wares. Antisthenes and his followers frequented one called Cynosarges, and the first half of the word may probably have given a nickname to the rising sect, for the wits of Athens were not slow to play upon the meaning of the name,

which meant "a dog," and found an apt reference in it to what they thought the low aims and dogged ways of the new teachers. Diogenes, especially, took the rough banter in good part, recognising even its characteristic fitness by many a rude jest or symbolic act, and the Corinthians at last placed the figure of a dog in Parian marble on his grave.

No Greek school had so narrow an intellectual basis, and in none was the moral type so entirely unchanged from age to age. It was the independence of the character of Socrates which caught the fancy of Antisthenes; the strength of will and power of self-assertion was what he tried to copy, but he could not understand the analytic subtlety, or appreciate the pregnant shrewdness of his master's thought. Indeed, all speculation seemed to him quite idle or fantastic which did not bear directly upon moral questions: general conceptions were but fictions of the fancy, for individuals alone were real, definitions dealt with verbal quibbles, and the hopes of scientific progress were delusive. But no deep researches seemed to be required to give such knowledge as was needful for the guidance of man's life, virtue alone could make him happy; to secure that he must concentrate his efforts on himself, and might safely neglect all beside. Nothing was really good but virtue; nothing but vice was absolutely bad; all else should be indifferent. The only thing which he could truly call his own, which might be placed beyond the power of chance, was mind; in moral action, and in that alone, he could be really free; all else depended upon some influence

from without, and might desert him in his hour of need. Wealth was very treacherous and blind, fatal temptation to some men, source of untold misery to others. Honour was an empty bubble, blown by the ignorant and foolish. Sensual pleasure was a form of madness, which threw the reason wholly off its balance. But labour and hardship, though man in his folly shrunk from them, were good, for they served to keep his powers in proper training, and raised him to a healthy independence.

So Hercules was the type of the true hero, for old fables pictured him as the knight errant, doing battle with every form of evil, and never flinching from the path of duty. The Cynics copied even, as best they could, the traditional symbols with which he was invested by Greek art, and reproduced his club and lion's skin with the philosophic staff and mantle. Virtue, therefore, in one sense, they thought, consists of knowledge, but it is a knowledge that all else is vanity, that common pleasures are at best treacherous and unsubstantial, and unworthy of serious pursuit. But virtue, in its positive aspect, is a course of training, an exercise of the free will, an assertion of the strength within, an independence of all that lies without. The wise alone can gain that calm which is unruffled by the gusts of fortune, can find a home in any scene, and live a life of heaven on earth. All else are in a piteous plight, slaves to their passions and unreason, living in a sort of lazar-house, where the Cynic can hardly find a healthy man, though he search with a lantern in his hand.

It was not enough with Socrates to practise moderation, or to control the wayward impulses of passion. Their object was to push much further their indifference to all that was not wholly in their power, to reduce their wants within the narrowest limits, and trample on the pleasures they despised. The Greek level of requirements was moderate enough, if judged by the standard of our modern comforts; but the Cynics would reduce life to its barest elements, and prune away most of the decencies of civilized society as the mere superfluities of luxurious refinement. They gave up their property to live upon the beggar's dole; they were content with the scantiest clothing, and that sometimes so ragged that Antisthenes was told his vanity might be seen through the holes of his own coat. They could dispense with house or bed, and stretch themselves to sleep upon the stones, or like Diogenes, in some convenient tub. The plainest diet was thought enough; and as a return to simple nature, it was proposed even to dispense with the help of fire, and to eat all their food uncooked.

While so many of the wants of civilized life were thus discouraged, it was not likely that the institutions of the State would be regarded with much favour The sage, they thought, should feel himself a citizen of the world at large, and be indifferent to the petty politics of any little State, with all their much ado about the trifles of honours or official rank. None of the governments that were could satisfy his judgment, for in all of them the choice of rulers turned on the accidents of fortune, not on the essentials of true

moral worth. Of what value were the laws of any State to one who had learnt to be law unto himself, however useful they might be to provide for knaves and fools? Why should he prize the social union at all who thought meanly of all its material symbols, such as money, markets, senate-houses, law-courts; who was careless even about civil freedom on the ground that he alone was the real slave who was mastered by his passions or his fears, and that strength of will would assert itself with the more credit under discouraging conditions.

In his "Dialogue of the Republic," Plato sketches an imaginary picture of the simplest rudiments of social life in a supposed state of nature, but a young Athenian who is present in the scene impatiently objects that such an Utopia is only fit for pigs. Plato is probably referring in this passage to the extravagances of the Cynics, and it may seem to us perhaps that the stricture is not too harsh when we find that some of them had no reverence even for the sanctities of the home life, but thought the ties of family were an artificial bondage, and could be best replaced by a community of wives, that the aspirant after virtue might not be distracted by material cares, or hampered in his efforts to assert his perfect freedom.

In their strange hankering for the state of nature, they professed such indifference to the opinion of the world, that they seemed to aim at the suppression of all modesty or shame. They insisted, that is, overmuch on the broad lines of distinction between conventional decencies and moral right. The latter was

alone, they said, of any value, and we need only be ashamed when we ignore its claims upon our reason. The former are artificial and unreal, varying as they do from age to age and land to land. It is false delicacy, therefore, to regard the sentiments of others on such points, or to refrain from any natural act in public, however revolting it may seem to the morbid taste of silly worldlings.

It is not to be supposed, indeed, that they could always act up to their principles completely, or push to such outrageous lengths their disregard of finer feelings. But in the stories left us of Diogenes and others in grave writers, there is evidence enough of bold effrontery and insolent self-assertion, relieved as it might be by homely wit or humorous eccentricity of manner, ennobled as it was moreover by the missionary spirit of their lives, and the energy with which they set themselves, alike in season and out of season, to preach the Cynic creed.

The satirist, Lucian, who, five centuries later, mocks at the follies of his age, includes the Cynic in his gallery of social portraits. In the auction scene, when each of the old philosophers of Greece is put up for auction and knocked down to the highest bidder Diogenes appears among the others on the stage, and is made to appraise himself in the characteristic language of his sect. It is curious to note that here at least the portrait is no parody, or rather that there was nothing left for caricature. Not a word is put into his mouth that is not ascribed to him by graver authors, and the mad Socrates, as an ancient writer called him, is

described with perfect sincerity and historic truth. Another scene of Lucian portrays a would-be sage thrusting himself uninvited on a supper party, descanting in high-flown terms on simple moderation, but disgusting all the guests with the boastful effrontery of his philosophic phrases, which contrasted strangely with his drunken and lascivious habits. The description illustrates the fact, which we have indeed from other sources, that many a sturdy beggar and ill-conditioned vagrant took up as a convenient disguise the Cynic staff and mantle, bringing by his dissolute life still more into disfavour the obnoxious tenets of the sect, somewhat as the monk's cowl, in the later days of Christendom, was donned by many an unworthy pretender to the spiritual life.

The Cynics have often been compared with the Begging Friars of the Middle Ages, and some features of resemblance are obvious enough. Such are the self-chosen life of poverty, the austerity of dress and manner, the missionary spirit often shown, the rude uncourtly vigour of the language in which they denounced vices in high places, while they spoke to the people in the people's tongue.

But the comparison rests mainly on the accidents of dress, and manner, and ascetic life, and the points of difference are most essential. The mendicant orders chiefly did their work among the weak, and ignorant, and poor. They moved to and fro among the neglected masses of the towns, or among villagers in lonely hamlets, ministering alike to body and to mind. They did not, like the Cynics, foster spiritual

pride, and preach counsels of perfection to the strong and self-contained; they did not loosen recklessly the ties of social union or domestic life, but they had words of comfort for the sick and hopeless, while they enforced the claims of homely duties, and bade men walk humbly with their God. They did not stunt or deform the ideal of intellectual life, for from the Dominican and Franciscan orders came the greatest of the schoolmen, the subtlest spirits of their age, famed in the lecture-halls of Paris and of Oxford for their mastery of the old systems of philosophy, as well as for their reverent handling of the mysteries of the faith.

CHAPTER III.

THE RISE OF STOICISM AND ITS RELATION TO THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE.

THE Roman satirist Juvenal remarked that the distinction between the Cynics and the Stoics lay only in the coat they wore, and it is of interest for us to note how the latter clung to the main principles which have just been described among the tenets of the former, while they tried to tone down the extravagance of their conclusions. The Stoic system, like the rest of the great Socratic schools, took form and substance first at Athens, and was gradually developed by Zenon, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus in the course of the third century before our era.

It was the age of Macedonian supremacy in Greece, when Alexander's empire had fallen into fragments, and the ceaseless wars, vices, and follies of his various successors filled the imagination of the world.

Demosthenes, the great orator of the democracy of Athens, had spent his energies and life in the fruitless effort to preserve the independence of his country; the single-hearted Phocion, who had counselled more submissive action, but had proudly declined the proffered gold of Macedon, had been flung aside at last as a dishonoured tool, and had fallen as a victim to the fury of a capricious people. Demetrius Phalereus, ruling as the viceroy of a foreign despot, had been a

kindly patron of the arts and liberal studies, and secured peace and plenty to the land to compensate for the lost self-respect and turbulent energy of freedom.

There were worse times indeed to follow, when the degradation of the State was more complete, and the indignities of her public action more profound. If we would know something of the social aspects of those times we shall find some striking illustrations in Plutarch's account of Demetrius Poliorcetes, in whose life adventurous exploits strangely contrasted with wild extravagance and licence. What the rulers of the period often were we may judge from the quiet words of Plutarch: "Of the descendants of Antigonus Philip was the only prince who put his son to death; whereas in the families of other kings nothing is more common than the murder of sons, mothers, and wives. As for the killing of brothers, like a postulate in geometry, it was considered as indisputably necessary to the safety of the reigning prince." [1]

Royal insolence may be measured by the mad whim of Demetrius, who ordered the Athenians to "raise two hundred and fifty talents in a very short time, and the money was exacted with the greatest rigour. When the money was brought in, and he saw it all together, he ordered it to be given to Lamia and his other mistresses to buy soap. Thus the disgrace hurt them more than the loss, and the application more than the impost." [2]

[1] Plutarch, "Demetrius," translation of Langhorne. [2] Ibid.

Even among the Macedonians at home he showed a haughtiness as great, offending by his ostentatious dress and his luxurious and dissolute habits, but most of all by the difficulty of access to him, for he either refused to see the applicants, or behaved to them in a harsh and haughty manner. "One day, when he seemed to come out in a more obliging temper, and to be something less inaccessible, he was presented with several petitions, all which he received and put them in the skirt of his robe. The people of course followed him with great joy; but no sooner was he come to the bridge over the Axius than he opened his robe and shook them all into the river."[1]

But the Athenians were worthy of such rulers. In their senile adulation they called Demetrius and his father gods and saviours, and abolishing the archonship they created special priests to do them honour, and prefixed their names to all the public acts. "They consecrated the place where their patron first alighted from his chariot, and erected an altar there to Demetrius Catabates." They passed even a decree "that those who should be sent upon public business to Antigonus and Demetrius should not be called ambassadors, but *Theori*, a title which had been appropriated to those who on the solemn festivals carried the customary sacrifices to Delphi and Olympia in the name of the Grecian states."[2]

"These instances of adulation concluded with their changing the name of the month Munychion to

[1] Plutarch, "Demetrius." [2] Ibid.

Demetrion, with calling the last day of every month Demetrios, and the Dionysia, or feasts of Bacchus, Demetria."[1] In Athenæus, again, we may read how they received him when he came among them, "not only with frankincense and crowns, and libations of wine, but they even went out to meet him with hymns and choruses." The very hymn addressed to him on this occasion is still existing, and it may help us to understand how far the religion of the age could be a stay or strength to earnest minds :—

"Behold, the greatest of the gods and dearest
Are come to this city ;
For here Demeter and Demetrius are
Present in season.
She indeed comes to duly celebrate
The sacred mysteries
Of her most holy daughter—he is present
Joyful and beautiful,
As a god ought to be, with smiling face,
Showering his blessings round.
How noble doth he look ! his friends around,
Himself the centre.
His friends resemble the bright lesser stars,
Himself is Phœbus.
Hail, ever mighty Neptune's mightier son ;
Hail, son of Venus !
For other gods do at a distance keep,
Or have no ears,
Or no existence ; and they heed us not—
But you are present,
Not made of wood or stone, a genuine god.
We pray to thee."

---

[1] "Athenæus," Yonge's Translation, vi. 62.

"This," says Athenæus, "is what was sung by the nation which once fought at Marathon, and they sang it not only in public but in their private houses —men who had once put a man to death for offering adoration to the King of Persia."

Finally, they changed even the times and seasons to humour his caprices, as when he wrote to tell them that he proposed to have himself admitted to both the greater and the lesser mysteries, which were held properly in different months and far apart. "Stratocles procured a decree that the month Munychion should be called and reputed the month Anthesterion, to give Demetrius an opportunity for his first initiation. After which Munychion was changed again into Boedromion."[1] By these means Demetrius was admitted to both mysteries.

These extravagant compliances of Athens were proved to be no fruit of love, for we read that after the decisive battle, which ruined the power of Demetrius, he reckoned chiefly on their loyalty, "for with them he had left his ships, his money, and his wife Deidamia; and in this distress he thought he could have no safer asylum than their affection. He, therefore, pursued his voyage with all possible expedition; but ambassadors from Athens met him near the Cyclades, and entreated him not to think of going thither, because the people had declared by an edict that they would receive no king into their city . . . . To be deceived beyond all his expectations by the

[1] Plutarch, "Demetrius."

Athenians, to find by facts that their affection, so great in appearance, was only false and counterfeit, was a thing that cut him to the heart." [1]

No wonder, then, if serious minds found politics distasteful, and sought a refuge in the quiet studies which promised to make them independent of the low standards of society around them.

The history of the Greek drama also seems to illustrate this change of feeling. The early comedy of Athens reflects in every page the public movements of the times; is full of reference to the wars, diplomacy, and themes of national debate, and so is almost meaningless without the knowledge of contemporary annals. The plays of Menander, on the contrary, written as they were in times of political exhaustion, betake themselves almost entirely to the scenes of private life, and find their chief interest in sentiments and passions common to all ages. "I am a man," says first one and then another of the characters of the new comedy in the period with which we are concerned. The belief that men have all one nature and a common destiny seems always present to their thoughts, and is appealed to as a ground for resignation and a motive for compassion, as well as an excuse for tears and an argument for self-control. Philosophy came in to deepen the feeling and explore its issues, while it substituted moral independence for the old ideal of State rights and sovereign power.

Athens, as we have seen, no longer gave the law

[1] Plutarch, "Demetrius."

to a thousand subject-states; but she was still, without dispute, the intellectual centre of the civilized world. Students flocked to her, not only from the neighbouring lands of Greece and the islands of the Archipelago, but from the coasts of Asia Minor and the towns of the Phenician sea-board. It was a time of disquiet and exhaustion, when the streams of national life were flowing feebly, and men could walk no more without misgiving in the old paths of custom and religion. They turned, therefore, with eagerness to any teachers who professed to have explored the mysteries of life, and to have found a safe rule for human action. A sage's reputation often was enough to draw them from their distant homes in quest of wisdom. Not only the young, but men, and greybeards even crossed the seas to gather round some celebrated teacher in the favoured home of Greek philosophy, where all the rival systems had their eager followers and master spirits. Sometimes they seemed to hear a sudden call to earnest thought, as in the later stories of conversion to religious life. Thus Zenon, as we read in the old story, came on other business to Athens, but while there took up in a bookseller's shop a copy of Xenophon's Socratic Memoirs, which he read long and earnestly, till he asked at length, "Where are such men to be found?" The Cynic Crates, who was passing by, was pointed out to him as one who had the secret of a higher life, and Zenon forthwith followed him as a disciple, till he became himself a teacher in his turn. In that, as in the other schools of Athens, there were many votaries of learning, young

and old, who freely grouped themselves around a recognised leader, listening to his exposition of the truth, and trying to reduce his lessons to the hard test of practice. Each was supposed to reproduce in authorized form the tenets of the Plato, Aristotle, or Antisthenes, who had been the founders of the various schools of thought. Once appointed to the post of honour, he filled it commonly till death closed his labours; but while he lived he chose another who might step into his place when he was gone, or in his will put the office in commission for a while, till the disciples who were trusted most could make their choice. It was a purely voluntary system, for it was long before the foremost men could be regarded as professors, appointed or salaried by the State. Rather, they lived upon the footing of the Free Churches of our modern times, and the principal members acted somewhat as the deacons, choosing at times, though it does not appear that they dismissed, their spiritual head. To the credit of the philosophic sects, it should be noticed that each enjoyed a rare degree of harmony within itself; even the most restless spirits seldom ventured to dispute the master's claims to their obedience, or to set up a rival oracle beside him. Many, even of the greatest name, appear to have waited quietly for many years, till a vacancy was made by death, or they were invited to assume the foremost place. We hear only of one, Chrysippus, who set up for himself while the head of his school was still alive;

[1] Cf. "University Life in Ancient Athens," c. ii.

and even he owned his fault, we are told, in later days, and owned that the one thing which he regretted was undutiful behaviour to Cleanthes.

In most of the Greek towns, as has been said, there were public buildings called gymnasia, built chiefly, it is true, for bodily exercises and athletic feats, but largely used, by the sufferance of the State, for the lectures and discussions of the philosophers or sophists. It was not long before the several schools drew themselves apart into special buildings or into various quarters of the city; and some even took their most familiar name, such as the Academy of Plato, and the Aristotelian Lyceum, and the Garden of Epicurus in the outer Ceramicus, from the localities in which they made themselves at home. There was a splendid porch or colonnade at Athens called the Stoa Poicile, from the varied paintings with which the genius of the great artist Polygnotus had adorned it. Memories of horror had been long associated with it as a scene of judicial murder during the reign of terror of the Thirty Tyrants, when so many of the foremost citizens had died by the executioner's hand. But there were also memories of the patriotism and the virtue that had perished there, and Zenon was content to connect his teaching with such lessons of the past when he gathered his disciples round him in the open space which was then left at his disposal; here he taught publicly for many years, and his successors chose it also as the scene of their debates, and hence they soon gained the distinctive name of Stoics, and their sentiments were called the tenets of the Porch. In most of the

schools we find some modest traces of endowments. Thus Theophrastus in his will disposed as follows of the house and garden near the Ilissus which came into his hands after Aristotle's death :—"My garden and the walk, and all the buildings which adjoin the glebe, I bequeath to such of my friends herein described as care to pass their lives in them together in study and philosophy, on condition that no one shall alienate them or make any individual claim; but that all shall share alike, and live in domestic peace together, as is natural and right."

Epicurus also left his famous garden, at his death, for the members of his school, and also set apart some funds to keep the student world together. "I give my property in trust to Amynomachus and Timocrates, on the condition that they make over the use of the garden and all it contains to Hermarchus and those who join his speculations, and to such as he may choose to take his place, that they may there give themselves to study; and, moreover, I beg all who take their principles from me to do their best as a solemn trust to keep Amynomachus and Timocrates to maintain the school-buildings in my garden, and their heirs after them, as also those who may be appointed to replace my own successors. And out of the funds bequeathed by me I will that my executors, in concert with Hermarchus, provide religious services for my father and mother, and brothers, and myself . . . and also for the stated meeting, to be held on the 20th of every month, by all the members of my sect."

Some of the philosophers had means enough to maintain themselves in studious ease without endowments of this sort; but, besides this, nearly all accepted presents from their hearers. Socrates, indeed, had thought it a low and mercenary practice for the teacher to take pay from those he taught, and his own friends and followers shared his sentiments, and taught freely all who came to learn. But before long the prejudice grew weaker, and the presents sent were readily accepted, and payment even demanded as a due. But the true Cynic cared, as we have seen, for little more than the means of bare subsistence. Some like Crates followed so far the counsels of perfection that they gave up all they had as only a hindrance in their quest for wisdom. The Stoics also, following their example, for some time discouraged all endowments, and would accept little or nothing from admirers or disciples. The wealthy or fastidious were likely to be repelled rather than attracted by their language; and if their enthusiasm was proof against hard words, they were sometimes put to irksome tasks to prove if the novices had the true hunger and thirst after philosophy. Thus Zenon, we are told, was too sensitive to the opinion of the world to carry out in their extreme forms the Cynic doctrines. "On which account," says Diogenes Laertius, "Crates wishing to cure him of this false shame, gave him a jar of lentil porridge to carry through the Ceramicus; and when he saw he was ashamed, and that he endeavoured to hide it, he struck the jar with his staff and broke it, and as Zenon fled away, and the lentil porridge

ran all down his legs, Crates called after him, 'Why do you run away my little Phœnician; you have done no harm?' The lesson seems to have been taken in good part, and the example followed afterwards in the treatment of his own disciples." "Once, when a handsome and wealthy Rhodian, but one who had no other qualification, was pressing him to take him as a pupil, he, as he was not inclined to receive him, first of all made him sit on the dusty seats that he might dirt his cloak, then he put him down in the place of the poor that he might rub against their rags, and at last the young man went away."[1]

It needed some toughness of moral fibre not to be offended at such a course of treatment, and we need not be surprised to find that among the earlier Stoics there were men of resolute temper, trained in the hard life of penury and toil. Thus Cleanthes "came to Athens, having but four drachmas, as some people say, and attaching himself to Zenon he devoted himself to philosophy in a most noble manner. . . . He was especially eminent for his industry, so that as he was a very poor man he was forced to undertake mercenary employment, and he used to draw water in the gardens by night, and by day he used to exercise himself in philosophical discussions. . . . They also say that he was on one occasion brought before a court of justice to be compelled to give an account what his sources of income were from which he maintained himself in such good condition; and that then

[1] Diogenes Laertius, "Zenon," translation by Yonge.

he was acquitted, having produced as his witness the gardener in whose garden he drew the water, and a woman who was a meal-seller, in whose establishment he used to prepare the meal. And the judges of the Areopagus admired him, and voted that ten minæ should be given to him, but Zenon forbade him to accept them."[1]

But Zenon had first practised the lessons of moderation which he enforced upon his younger friends. "He was a person," says Diogenes, "of great powers of abstinence and endurance and of very simple habits, living on food which required no fire to dress it, and wearing a thin cloak, so that it was said of him—

> The cold of winter and the ceaseless rain
> Come powerless against him; weak is the dart
> Of the fierce summer sun, or fell disease,
> To bend that iron frame. He stands apart,
> In nought resembling the vast common crowd;
> But patient and unwearied, night and day,
> Clings to his studies and philosophy."

He cared as little for the banter of the comic poets, who made him the object of their witticisms, as for the lavish compliments of King Antigonus, who used to listen to his lectures when he came to Athens, and at last invited him to Macedonia to instruct himself and all his subjects in the paths of virtue. Zenon returned a courteous answer, speaking in a tone of dignified approval of the great man's zeal for wisdom, and offering to send to court some of his trusted friends,

[1] Diogenes Laertius, "Zenon."

who would undertake the journey for which he was himself too old and feeble. The Athenians themselves, it seems, had such respect for the good old man who lived so long among them that they entrusted the keys of the city to his care; and when he passed away at length in ripe old age they voted a decree of public honours in the following terms:—"Since Zenon, the son of Innaseas, the Cittiæan, has passed many years in the city in the study of philosophy, being in all other respects a good man, and also exhorting all the young men who have sought his company to the practice of virtue, and encouraging them in the practice of temperance, making his own life a model to all men of the greatest excellence; since it has in every respect corresponded to the doctrines which he has taught, it has been determined by the people to praise Zenon and to present him with a golden crown in accordance with the law on account of his virtue and temperance, and to build him a tomb in the Ceramicus at the public expense. And the people has appointed by its vote five men from among the citizens of Athens who shall see to the making of the crown and the building of the tomb. And the scribe of the borough shall enrol the decree and engrave it on two pillars, and he shall be permitted to place one pillar in the Academy and one in the Lyceum."[1]

The ascetic side of Stoicism was thus embodied in the life of the first two great doctors of the

[1] Diogenes Laertius, "Zenon."

school, which may have seemed perhaps, so far, to careless eyes as only a softened form of the old Cynic creed. But its literary and constructive aspect was best represented in the person of Chrysippus, who wrote more than seven hundred different treatises on philosophic questions, and showed such power of illustration and acuteness in developing the tenets of his sect that it was said, "Had there been no Chrysippus, there had been no Porch." His critics, indeed, complained of the careless language and the frequent repetitions of his works, and of the undue length of his quotations from the earlier authors, and it is evident that he cared more for the matter than the artistic value of his writings. But the Stoic system as a whole was expanded and completed by him, and when he died, in 206 B.C., its characteristic features were entirely defined.

"If the gods have any logic," said an ancient author, "it is that of Chrysippus;" yet he wrote too much, and from too many points of view, to be always quite consistent in his statements. Plutarch, therefore, refers largely to him in his treatise on the Stoic inconsistencies; though his objections mainly illustrate the natural contrasts between a rigid theory and the real needs of common life, and the self-contradictions that arose out of the effort to become learned and many-sided and elastic without being untrue to a hard dogmatic creed.

CHAPTER IV.

STOICISM IN THE RIGOUR OF ITS ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLES.

THE strength and originality of the Stoic system is to be found undoubtedly in the rule of life which it professed, but nothing can seem more indefinite at first than the familiar phrase of "living in conformity with Nature," in which their moral standard was expressed. It might seem to admit of almost any explanation, and to lend itself as well to the grosser forms of practical Epicureanism, which justify the fullest indulgence of the instincts, as to the finer moods of Hellenic thought which entrusted the regulation of man's life to a sort of cultivated sympathy or artistic taste for natural beauty and refinement. Its value must depend upon the meaning which they gave to the word "Nature," and that was too full and many-sided to be included in a definition. We must first, therefore, gain a clearer notion of their views upon this and kindred subjects.

In the order and harmony of universal nature there are signs enough, they argued, of a First Cause and Governing Mind. Human instinct has everywhere pointed to this cardinal truth, and from this flow the multitudinous forms of worship in all lands. A little

thought upon the matter shows us that there must be a power inherent in the world to move it as the soul can move the body. That power must have consciousness and reason, else how can we explain the being of conscious creatures like ourselves, and all the intricate machinery of inter-connected means and ends. A building can no more exist without a builder than the order of the world without a ruling spirit. As we mount in thought along the ladder of creation, from class to higher class above it, we cannot but go on to the belief in a yet higher being whose moral and intellectual perfection is quite infinite, whom philosophers and simple folks alike call God. Of Him the Stoics speak in the language of devotional fervour, not only as an abstract Reason, but as a happy and beneficent Creator. But if we ask what were the real features of their creed we shall find to our surprise that it was one of *Pantheism* undisguised. God is the eternal substance which is always varying its moods, and passing into different forms as the creative work is going forward, and may be alike conceived therefore as the primary matter and the efficient force which shapes the derivative materials of which all things are made. Spoken of as active power He is God, but as the sum of all his emanations and effects He is the world, for the visible universe is only a passing stage in the eternal progress in which God is developing his powers. From God all things proceed, and to Him they will all return at last, when each cycle of time has run its course and the old emanations are absorbed into the source

of life, and the formation of a new world begins afresh.

This thorough-going Pantheism was expressed, moreover, in materialistic symbols, borrowed at least in part from a much earlier thinker, Heraclitus. God is conceived as fiery ether, or an atmospheric current, passing now by condensation into the forms of water and of earth, sublimated again into the state of air and fire, producing thus by turns the primary elements out of which the world is made. A local habitation is assigned to the central power from which all the living forces flow, though there is no general agreement on the subject; some call it heaven, while others hold it to be the sun or the centre of the earth. The matter in which this primary force has clothed itself awhile is being by slow degrees consumed, and will be exhausted at the last, when each cycle of time has run its destined course. The world and all the derivative materials which it contains will be dissolved in "fervent heat," and the divine substance, which is "uncompounded in its essence pure," will then alone remain.

Such expressions of the Stoics must not be regarded only as a picture language to assist the fancy, as the figures and symbols used by the soaring thought, when it would strive to body forth its visions. Rather to them it seemed that material things alone were real, their properties and forms were all produced by the existence of air currents, each radiating from the centre to which it must again return. The qualities of the soul as of the body were only varieties of

tension caused by atmospheric impact, and thus emotions, impulses, and judgments even might be regarded as material objects. Much of this, no doubt, was merely awkwardness of phraseology, and the real meaning was that the realities in question must depend on some material conditions. But ill-chosen as the language seems, it runs through all their logical and physical discussions, and sets a stamp of rude materialism on all their speculative thought.

As a natural consequence their forms of speech were fatalistic. There may seem, they said, to be hazard and caprice around us, but all things come to the birth and grow and pass away in unconditional dependence on a universal law: causes and effects are unchangeably connected by an absolute necessity which rules all being and all becoming. This fate, or destiny, is the reason of the world, for it is the natural law in which the course of the world may be expressed, the order of Providence in which the Deity unfolds his latent possibilities of being, and passes by development through all his stages, the sum of all the generative reasons which produce and shape the individual moods of nature.

Pantheistic systems often find in literary treatment a lyric fervour of expression, and may be combined in practice with a high degree of mystic resignation, but they are not quite in harmony with the language of devotion, which implies throughout belief in the being of a personal God, distinct from and above His creatures. Yet the phrases of simple piety are

to be found undoubtedly in Stoic writings, as in the striking verses of Cleanthes' hymn :—

"Thee it is lawful for all mortals to address. For we are Thy offspring, and alone of living creatures possess a voice which is the image of reason. Therefore I will for ever sing Thee and celebrate Thy power. All this universe rolling round the earth obeys Thee, and follows willingly at Thy command. Such a minister hast Thou in Thy invincible hands, the two-edged, flaming, vivid, thunderbolt. O King, most High, nothing is done without Thee, neither in heaven or on earth, nor in the sea, except what the wicked do in their foolishness. Thou makest order out of disorder, and what is worthless becomes precious in Thy sight; for Thou hast fitted together good and evil into one, and hast established one law that exists for ever. But the wicked fly from Thy law, unhappy ones, and though they desire to possess what is good, yet they see not, neither do they hear the universal law of God. If they would follow it with understanding they might have a good life. But they go astray, each after his own devices—some vainly striving after reputation, others turning aside after gain excessively, others after riotous living and wantonness. Nay, but, O Zeus, Giver of all things, who dwellest in dark clouds and rulest over the thunder, deliver men from their foolishness. Scatter it from their souls, and grant them to obtain wisdom, for by wisdom Thou dost rightly govern all things; that being honoured we may repay Thee with honour, singing Thy works without ceasing, as

it is right for us to do. For there is no greater thing than this, either for mortal men or for the gods, to sing rightly the universal law."[1]

A theory which identifies the world with God, and believes Him therefore to exist alike in the evil and the good, might be in the long run fatal to intensity of moral purpose, tending as it naturally does to slur over and efface the broad lines of distinction between good and evil which the common sense of humanity has sharply drawn. Yet the Stoic morality was stern and rigid, insisting in uncompromising tones upon the claims of duty. It was not content with the natural outcome of a fatalistic creed, with the reveries of calm submission absorbed in the contemplation of an infinite will, working out its plans in all the multitudinous forms of nature, but it braced the energies for active combat, and bade men resist and conquer evil. The existence of that evil might be explained, they sometimes thought, as an imperfection in detail which was necessary for the perfection of the whole, or as a supplement and counterpart to good, or as a flaw inherent in man's nature, which even the providence of God could not remove. These explanations, if not quite consistent with the leading principles which they professed, still show how strong was their anxiety to rescue spiritual realities from the bondage of a materialistic creed, to assert the dignity of God and man, and vindicate the moral order of the world.

[1] Sir A. Grant's translation.

This, then, was their view of Nature, ruled in all its parts by universal reason, which enters into the play of elemental forces, and ordains the pre-established harmony of the blind machinery which it sets in motion, while it attains to consciousness in man, and, strange to say, leaves room—if not for his personal freedom as commonly conceived, at least for his responsibility of choice, as well as for devotional feeling towards the God of which he is himself a part.

It is man's privilege, they said, that he alone of earthly beings has the gift of reason, can see the wisdom of the Providence which rules the world, and be in sympathy with its creative thought. He has, indeed, animal impulses and appetites like the lower creatures which surround him, which are left by Nature to such guidance, but man should surely respect his better self and be ruled by the noblest faculty within him. By virtue of this he may claim relationship with the Eternal Reason, and this identity will be the closer the more he gives free play and scope to the divine element of intellect within him. This must, indeed, one day, at the end of the world's course, be resolved into the universal substance into which all things will then return, when all individual existence will be lost; but, meantime, men may last on after death as separate souls, be cleansed even as in a state of purgatory from the stains and pollutions of the life on earth, and mount heavenward through the lower air till they reach a purer atmosphere congenial to their own ethereal nature, while the

souls of the criminal and foolish may have been so weakened by continued contact and intermingling with the evil as to have little power of vitality inherent in them when their bodies crumble to decay.

All things pursue, by an unconscious instinct, what is best suited to their nature: nothing else can have real value for them. The essential element in man is reason, and the naturalness and well-being of his life consist in rational action, or, in other words, in attuning all his thoughts and aims into perfect sympathy with the general law of reason, which is embodied in the universe around him. This, therefore, is the meaning of the Stoic rule. It is expressed, indeed, in varying forms. Some call it a life of consistency with self, others the harmony of life with Nature; and Nature again is now explained as the constitution of the personal agent, and now as the whole system of the world at large. But the real meaning always is the same, that man can only lead a rational life by conforming to a general law, and that he rises or falls in the scale of dignity and happiness as he succeeds or fails in doing this with persistent purpose, as he has more or less, in other words, of the virtue which consists in this willing obedience to law.

The leading principle thus stated was carried out to its conclusions with an exclusive and uncompromising rigour, and the startling paradoxes which they held seemed to follow naturally enough from their one-sided treatment of great truths. Good, in its wider sense, was commonly defined in the earlier schools as that which satisfies a natural want, but the

essential element, the true nature of man as distinct from other creatures, is his reason; and his real good, therefore, lies in rational action, or in virtue. There is no good independently of virtue; it is a popular misnomer to distinguish various kinds or different degrees of good, though we may of course admit, they said, that many things which are themselves indifferent, may conduce and help to something which is better than themselves. But bodily advantages and gifts of fortune have no abiding character of good, satisfy no permanent want of reason, have not that unconditional value of which alone the Stoic purists took account. So even health and wealth must be counted as indifferent, that is, with no distinctive character of good, for they may be and are sadly abused, and we may not do such dishonour to the absolute worth of virtue as to say that aught beside is needful to complete man's happiness. Still less must pleasure be the object of pursuit, as Epicurus and his followers held. Pleasure there is indeed in virtuous conduct, a cheerful serenity so sweet that we may say that only the wise man knows true pleasure, but we must not make that our aim and object which is indeed the consequence of noble action, but is itself too fleeting, sensuous, and unsubstantial, to be a standard or a rule of life. Virtue should be itself its own reward, and cannot need extraneous conditions to complete the happiness of those who have it. We need not say, indeed, that pleasure is unnatural and bad, though some stern moralists of the school would have it so; enough to say, that it is

not a real good, and must not be made an end, or the morality of action disappears.

If virtue was the only good for man, it followed that for his true self vice alone was evil, though many other things may seem to be so to the careless eyes which take account of the nature which connects him with the lower creatures. Hardship, poverty, disgrace, pain, sickness, death, seem evils to the beings who are content to live upon a lower level; but to the sage who would live up to a life of reason, they are things in themselves indifferent, taking their colour and their character from the use to which we put them.

The wise man alone is free, they said again, for he can make himself independent of the whims of fortune, can rise superior to so-called troubles, guard himself alike from care and fear and passionate desire, and enjoy the bliss of an unruffled calm. It is true that in another sense he is not free, has indeed less sense of freedom than the careless crowd, for he can recognise the general law of destiny within which all things revolve. His will, he knows, is mysteriously linked to the long chain of natural causes, but he seems free in that he can willingly obey the dictates of his nature without being helplessly determined by things external to himself. He decides on that which reason points to, and he acts under no sense of constraint or irksome pressure, for his will and universal intellect are one.

If reason alone is a sufficient guide for man, he must not value highly the animal impulses which also

prompt to action. He stands on a higher level than that of instinct, which sets the lower world in motion, and makes unconscious creatures seek their good. He forfeits his privilege of manhood if he forsakes the higher guidance for the lower. But this is not all; and we are here brought to a distinctive feature of the Stoic system, and to the curious psychology which it implies. The moods of our emotional nature, to the stronger forms of which we give the name of passions, were thought by them to have their seat within the reason, but to be wholly disturbing and misleading forces. Some fault of judgment or imagination, some false notion of good or evil lies always at the root of each, and makes them so dangerous and misleading. Irrational fancy as to present good gives rise to pleasure, while desire is a wrong estimate about the future. Unreal imaginings of evil cause us care as to the present, or fear of that which we think must come. It was easy to carry the analysis still further through the various moods of human nature, though it was not easy to explain why these distempered fancies should affect the judgment, or how the distinction between truth and falsehood could give rise to all the different features which distinguish reason and emotion. But their theory made short work of all these states of feeling, and branded them as disturbances of mental health, which tended to upset the natural balance of the soul, and to imperil fatally its self-control. The wise man will learn to measure things at their real value, and recognise the general law in all the shifting incidents around him; he will

see that the passions are not natural to man, save in so far as are the diseases which affect the body; he will strive to keep the mastery over such faulty fancies, and be true to the consummate virtue which is passionless and calm. There will be nothing for him then to fear, for unreason is the only evil; nothing to desire beyond himself, for his happiness of intellectual balance is quite self-contained; no cause for anger, for others cannot really harm him, and he should not need a thrill of feeling to stir him to defend the right.

It might be thought, perhaps, that this destructive criticism would at least deal somewhat tenderly with the grace of mercy and the feeling of compassion, but the austere moralists of the school would not allow of any such condescension to our human weakness. Relieve the wants and succour the distresses of your fellow-men, they said, in such measure as the laws of general well-being may ordain, but these delicate tasks should be entrusted to the calmer moods of reason, and not to passionate thrills of sympathy which will make you bungle in your work. Much of the seeming misery around you is unreal, for the evils of which men talk are often only the nightmares of their own disordered fancy; the sage must be careful not to come down from his serener heights, to encourage the delusions of weak men, and the strong ones will not want his pity, for the only evils that they know of for themselves are within their power to remove.

This passionless serenity of balanced temper is

what was meant by the Stoic *apathy* so famous in the schools of Greece and Rome; it postulated not only the absolute supremacy of reason but its rightful claims to be the only motive force within the soul, for it would make a solitude of all besides and call it peace; but it implied no torpor of ecstatic reveries and mystic contemplation, such as those which Eastern ascetics have enjoyed, in their attempts to close every pore and inlet of emotion, and to end almost in pure nothingness of individual being.

We have seen that in their pictures of the moral life there is no place left for feeling, save in so far as its calmer moods may rank as states of reason; while the emotions or the passions are regarded as a morbid bias given to the thoughts. It was far easier for them to ignore the will as a separate factor in the soul, or to see in it nothing more than knowledge in a state of action. But if knowledge is thus left as the one thing needful in the analysis of human conduct, it would seem to follow as by natural sequence that the different virtues are only forms of partial knowledge, such as belong to our imperfect state, and that we may all have, some more some less, of the truth which constitutes salvation. But they were far from allowing this conclusion. They insisted for the most part, it is true, that the virtues were distinct in kind, accounting for their several features sometimes by the variety of objects with which they are connected, sometimes by peculiar qualities inherent in the soul; but all of them, they thought, have the same end in obedience

to the general laws of Nature—all have the same quality of tone or temper or conviction, on which they are all strung as on a silver thread, and which once broken carries with it the decay of each and all. The merit of each act consists alone in the intention, which is unconditionally good or bad. If it be the former, virtue exists then in its entirety ; if the latter, the whole character is naught.

Hence, well-known paradoxes follow, with which the wits of Rome afterwards made merry, and which were certainly of a kind to startle common sense.

1st. There is no difference of degree they said between the vices. The results may be widely different of course : some seem to do much harm and others little, but in themselves they are alike derangements of the mental health, proofs that the right intention is not present, but that unreason rules the soul. The bad man, therefore, can do nothing right, and he that commits one crime is guilty of all.

2nd. The wise man is absolutely perfect, lord of himself and master of the world. There is no loveliness on earth to be compared with the moral excellence of virtue, no freedom like the peace of perfect self-control, no wealth like that of wisdom, which fits him for every form of active work, and even makes him ruler and king by right divine if not by universal suffrage, as well as priest of the mysteries of heaven and earth.

3rd. The sage is a citizen of the whole world. There is nothing narrow, nothing selfish, in his views, for his whole effort is to rise above his personal and

local limits to the sphere of universal law. He will not neglect, indeed, the duties that lie ready to his hand; he will respect the ties of family and country, though he will not let them bound his horizon of benevolence, and will often have to rise above their incomplete and sordid maxims. Much of the Stoic language on this subject may be, no doubt, explained with reference to the circumstances of their age, when the free commonwealths of Greece were overshadowed by the power of Macedon, and wider sympathies and freer thought replaced the narrow intensity of the old Hellenic standards. Something was due, also, to the fact that the earlier Stoics were not commonly of Greek descent, but came from the islands or the coasts of Asia, where Semitic influence had largely modified the bias given in the schools of Athens. But apart from this, the leading principles of their Stoic theory must have tended to discourage the zeal of the patriot and the efforts of the statesman. As an able and learned critic has remarked,[1] "a philosophy which attaches moral value to the cultivation of intentions only, considering all external circumstances at the same time as indifferent, can hardly produce a taste or a skill for overcoming those outward interests and circumstances with which a politician is chiefly concerned. A system which regards the mass of men as fools, which denies to them every healthy endeavour and all true knowledge, can hardly bring itself unreservedly to work for a State.

[1] Zeller. Translation by Reichel, p. 307.

the course and institutions of which depend upon the majority of its members, and are planned with a view to their needs, prejudices, and customs. Undoubtedly, there were able statesmen among the Stoics of the Roman period, but Rome and not Stoicism was the cause of their statesmanship. Taken alone, Stoicism could form excellent men, but hardly excellent statesmen. And looking to facts, not one of the old masters of the school ever had or desired any public office."

4th. Local or national ties, as we have seen, lay lightly on the conscience of the Stoic; there were occasions even, as he thought, when it might be well for him to give up life itself, if he could no longer play his part in it with dignity or profit. They were very far indeed from counselling or condoning suicide in fits of passion or despair. The fatal results of vice and folly were not to be shaken off so easily by one rash plunge into the void, but would leave their marks upon the undying soul, and condemn it to misery still to come. But to the wise man death was in itself no evil, and when he was brought face to face, as some might be, with conditions in which he could not turn his wisdom to a good account, or when some nobler end might be attained by death, he might calmly and cheerfully trust to his own hand to give him freedom, or to usher him to a better life beyond the grave. Thus Zenon in ripe old age grew weary of the burden of his years, and recognised in a fall and broken limb the summons to be gone. Cleanthes was bidden to abstain from food awhile

to cure a bodily disease, and persisted even in the same course when the passing object was attained, saying that it was a pity to retrace his steps as he was now so far upon the road. Cato courted death with his own hands when his cause was wholly lost and the commonwealth was ruined. And in the evil days of Roman tyranny the counsel fell on willing ears, and many hurried from a world which seemed given over irredeemably to violence and lust.

CHAPTER

STOICISM TEMPERED BY CONCESSIONS TO COMMON SENSE.

If Stoicism always had remained on the high level of the austere and rigid tenets described in the last chapter, it might have given substance to the reveries of a few lonely thinkers here and there, but it would hardly have taken rank as one of the great moving forces of the earnest minds of heathendom. It had, indeed, already passed beyond the narrow Cynic dogmas; it had abandoned the rude protest against civilized life, and the discouragement of speculative thought. It had expanded on all sides the negative ideal at which the earlier system had stopped short. But there was still too much of the Cynic leaven working in its midst, in the frequent parade of paradox, the affected contempt for the opinion of the world, and ostentatious disparagement of common pleasures. It was too absolute in its negations, too unbending in its claims upon the conscience, to satisfy the countless souls who were craving light and guidance in the paths of duty, and not lofty sentiments about the vanity of human wishes. It was not long before the attempt was made to reconcile the claims of theory and practice, to relax

the rigour of their definitions, to tone down and modify the absoluteness of their maxims, and so to clothe the dry skeleton with flesh and blood as to give it vital force to move as a real power among the hearts and consciences of men. It may be well, first, to briefly indicate the chief directions in which some change or relaxation seemed required, without entering at present into much detail upon the subject. The practical mind of Rome, which had little taste for verbal subtlety or paradox, was most earnest in requiring a rule of life suited to the demands of common sense, and we shall have occasion at a later stage to quote largely from the great Roman Stoics, and see how much was gradually done by them to give warmth and colour, and many-sided interest, to what might seem at first unlovely and ungracious.

The extravagant pretensions of the earlier members of the school to lavish all the resources of the language in praise of the consummate sage soon caught the attention of contemporary critics, who keenly scrutinized its meaning. The wise man in whom there is no folly—no weakness, selfishness, or sin—the king-philosopher and high-priest of humanity—where is he to be found, and what are the tokens of his presence? The men and women whom we know have their good qualities and evil blended, and few of us can seriously think that we have ever seen perfection embodied in an earthly shape. Call it an ideal, if you will, to which we may tend but not attain, but then we have a right to remind you that your picture is confessedly a type of unapproachable

perfection. Other systems, moral and religious, have their ideals, which may be of good service if they shame us out of our languid self-content, and give us a rule by which to measure the poor realities of common life. They too have had their doctrines of original corruption, have mourned over the prevailing sinfulness of man, and have spoken sometimes harshly of the hollowness of all the seeming virtues that belong to the still unregenerate state. But they never ventured to affirm that, with a few possible but rare exceptions, humanity was made up of fools and knaves, in whom there was no good thing at all. Such statements outrage common sense, and give no sort of help in the rough paths of common life. The vast majority they seem to despair of and ignore, for there is no good in them on which to work, no fulcrum for the moral lever; the perfect, if such there are, stand above man's help, for they have found peace, and can enjoy a grace which is indefectible when it is once won.

To meet objections of this kind, the trenchant language of the school was softened down by kindlier and more hopeful tones. The two extreme alternatives were no longer regarded as exhaustive; room was left for earnest seekers and toilers after virtue, who were part of their Church Militant, which was not as yet triumphant. Henceforth men are encouraged to go forward, there is much talk in the school of progress, the various stages and criteria of which are reckoned up, and alike in theory and practice engage a large share of their attention. It was a word little known as yet to heathen thought, which

was singularly hopeless in its tone; while Jewish books looked forward and spoke ever of a good time coming, and had for the burden of their prophecy the bold, strong words "for ever," to the wisest even of the seers of pagandom, society seemed to revolve in fated cycles, and man's life to have little chance of being ever a gladder or a worthier thing. But now, one after another leading Stoic addressed himself to the work of moral education; the ascetic life was to be, as its name implies, a course of training, not an idle and contemptuous protest at the refinements of our civilized life, but a series of experiments to test the soul's native power to resist temptation and unloose the coils of habit.

In softening down the outlines of their picture of perfection, it was natural to relax the rigour of the apathy which had been made one of its marked features. It had been often urged already by Greek critics, that Reason was not of itself an ultimate source of action; its province was to sift and to compare the elements of choice, and to step in with authority among the various Desires, but not to set the Will in motion by itself. If left to Reason's rule alone, without a motive force to stir it, the complex machinery could never work, and apathy must shortly end in complete stagnation of the natural system. In answer to such arguments, the Stoics said that there were reasonable states of feeling which might and must exist in the wise man. Nothing passionate or turbulent, indeed, could be allowed there, only the gentlest ripples on the current of emotion; and

the most colourless words were appropriated by them to these serenities of feeling, high and pure, which were worthy of admission into the holy peacefulness of Stoic apathy. The difference between themselves and their opponents, therefore, was narrowed now to a mere verbal question, and the old elements of the emotional nature, before seemingly excluded, were readmitted under different names.

Thus we have restored to us again some of the tenderer sympathies of human nature, which were put before under the ban, making thus a cold and mutilated manhood, to offend us with its tones of insolent paradox. The social instinct, with its cluster of kindred sentiments, is now allowed to rank as natural, though it may seem to risk that independence of the outer world which is the main condition of the Stoic freedom. The virtue of mercy reappears, to drop its balm upon the wounds, and spare the offender when he falls, though still misgivings are expressed, and theory speaks with an uncertain sound on the emotional aspects of compassion. Friendship and love too find their place, and that a large one, in the moral code, though put of course upon a rational basis, and purged of all the grossness of our common clay.

We have seen above how narrow was the list of things admitted by the Stoics to be really good or evil, and how broadly nearly all the objects which men desire or shun were labelled by them as *indifferent.* Insisting as it did so much on a life agreeable to Nature, their theory made light of what are

certainly the primary instincts of our complex being, and made the naturalness consist alone in the effort of reason to maintain a balance, and show obedience to a higher law. Yet common sense would have its say upon the subject, and remind them that there must be some motive for our choice in action, and that none such can be supplied, if Reason on its side can see no difference of good or evil, and emotion on the other is to be silenced or completely purged away. A large concession, therefore, was required and made to modify the absoluteness of their definition. Among the wide class of things which are not good or evil in the highest sense, there are yet some which have a kind of value, as meeting a natural want, or conducing to a higher good, or as helping to maintain the body's health, or allowing freer play for active thought. For these a new class was invented of things to be preferred (*προηγμένα*), their contraries were to be avoided (*ἀποπροηγμένα*), and the old name indifferent (*ἀδιάφορα*) was now reserved for a much narrower class of things of neutral tint and accidental value. The importance of the change consisted in the appreciable value thus assigned under the first head to the bodily advantages and gifts of fortune, which the austerer spirits of the earlier school had contemptuously swept out of the list of goods, as unworthy of the sage's serious thought.

In close connection with the compromises and reserves described above, there was one further distinction drawn by them which it is of interest to note.

Their standard of right action had at first been very absolute in its requirements and trenchant in its terms. It was virtuous conduct, dealing with the unconditionally good, animated by a high and pure intention. But now the large class of secondary goods, objects to be preferred or shunned, reasonable states of calm emotion, which they had ignored before, began to press upon the moralist's attention, who was bound to discuss their proper limits and the fitting modes of action in such cases, and to develop finally a code of moral rules to be applied in all their varying relations. These were only conditional and incomplete, falling short of the high standard of absolute perfection (*κατόρθωμα*) on which their eyes had all been fixed before to the exclusion of these poor details of common life, but they were seen now to have a value for the many who were striving to make progress to a higher state, and who needed kindly guidance while passing through the stages of transition. So these proprieties of conduct, these decencies and rules of choice in worldly matters, were defined and classified with an increasing care, at times even with subtlety and casuistical minuteness, and it is curious to observe that the term employed to designate these lower rules (*καθήκοντα*) passed first into the Latin word *officia*, and then into our English *duties*, thus gradually becoming more absolute in sense, and more associated with ideas of law and conscience. To the Stoic, however, it implied the worldly rules of work-day life, distinct from the counsels of perfection (*κατόρθωμα*) addressed only to the

privileged few, who could climb the philosophic heights and breathe the purer air where all sense of effort was henceforth merged in the fruition of the Truth.

The distinction lingered on in later ages, when the Christian saint stepped into the place of Stoic sage, and the old rules of ascetic life passed with little change into the austerities of monk or hermit, and those who would be perfect were bidden to renounce the world, whose joys and sorrows, trials and temptations could give scope only, it was thought, to a meaner and inglorious virtue, while even the sanctities of family ties and honest work were degraded to the level almost of the things indifferent or at best of relative and imperfect value.

There could not be much sympathy at first in the attitude of early Stoicism towards the popular religion. It was reverent and devout, indeed, developing the idea of Providence with a precision quite unknown before, recognising the Divine in all the many-sided life of Nature, but its Puritanism was of too cold and intellectual a type to be attracted by the sensuous pomp and symbolism of the people's worship; it could not possibly accept the fantastic immoralities of the old Greek legends, as giving any true conception of the Godhead. It was somewhat hostile, therefore, at the first,—insisted that the Deity would not care to dwell in buildings made with hands, that prayers were for the most part spent upon unfitting objects, such as goods of body or of fortune, or that prayer was entirely a mistake, since God was good,

and knew far better than ourselves the needs to which He would minister in His own time. But the religious convictions of the people, however erring and one-sided in details, were too important to be lightly dealt with, for on them depended much of the respect for law and order, and the most familiar sanctions of morality.

Attempts were made, therefore, to reconcile the popular and the philosophic creed. The Zeus of the Greek Pantheon was identified with the all-pervading spirit of Divinity, of which the minds of men were only partial moods or emanations, and as such therefore supernatural (δαίμονες); while the universe contained, perhaps, still higher forms, on which the bounded fancy of the masses rested without mounting to their common source.

As for the strange myths in the people's Bible, the fanciful descriptions of the poets, these were, perhaps, only the sensuous disguises of a picture language in which the thoughts of manhood had been bodied forth for childish fancy; there were surely deeper truths below, though the symbols might seem coarse or grotesque, and a little patient study might ascertain their hidden meaning. By the method of allegorical interpretation the Stoics were enabled to explain the follies or indecencies that shocked their moral sense in the old religious creed, and find below them a substratum of physical and spiritual truth such as could content the intellectual aspirations of their age. It was a method largely used by them and in ingenious ways, but they were not long allowed to

retain exclusive hold upon it; the schools of Neoplatonism resorted to it constantly, resolving by its aid the simplest figures of poetry and facts of history into vague abstractions of the most transcendental type. Some of the early Christian fathers, such as Origen, used it largely in their turn, and thus succeeded in extracting a series of philosophic dogmas out of the plain naturalism of the historic language of the Pentateuch.

CHAPTER VI.

STOICISM AT ROME UNDER THE REPUBLIC.

The principles of Stoicism, which have been thus far described, were developed chiefly in the lecture-rooms of Athens, whose world-wide reputation as a seat of learning drew earnest seekers after wisdom from every civilized land. Students of many races there were mingled; and among them the Cilicians, Syrians, and others of Semitic speech, seemed to have been most attracted by the Stoic dogmas; while the schools of Epicurus and the New Academy were more congenial perhaps to the true Hellenic nature. In the West these systems of philosophy were little known. The Roman energy, now in the mid course of its career of conquest, was chiefly occupied with the stirring game of politics and war, and had scarcely begun to meditate as yet upon the mysteries of life and Nature. The time-honoured customs and ceremonial usages of public life, the rigour of domestic training with its appeals to all the venerable associations of the past, the spirit of clanship and the fervour of patriotic zeal, these supplied the Roman with a definite rule of duty, which law and religion alike enforced with potent sanctions. But at length a new era opened when the legions crossed the seas, and the generals

and statesmen came into close contact with the older civilizations of the world.

The language and the literature of Greece became a necessary study to the governing families of the conquering State; her poetry and art made them feel the narrowness and coldness of their own national culture; Greek rhetoricians soon appeared at Rome dazzling the inexperienced hearers with their specious words, ready to make any subject matter of debate, and to argue with equal readiness on every side. They were not accepted there, indeed, without a protest. The old spirit of conservatism found many a sturdy representative among the ruling classes; men like the older Cato vehemently denounced the foreign brood of sciolists and sophists, who played fast and loose with every principle of faith and reason, and seemed of very wantonness to unsettle every conviction. More than once the magistrates or Senate decided on strong measures to put down the growing evil, and banished from the soil of Italy the dangerous teachers whom they dreaded.

But the age was one of rapid change, and authority was powerless to stay the tide. Half a century had been enough to humble every rival that barred the way of Rome's ambition, and had left her undisputed mistress in the East. The spoil of the world had poured into her coffers. Her capitalists and bankers were not slow to turn their opportunities to good account; a new school of diplomatists and statesmen of wider aims and suppler policy had been trained in scenes of foreign warfare; one and all were of no

mind to walk in the old paths and be bound by the rigid trammels of the past. The rude simplicity, the narrow formalisms, the uninquiring faith of earlier days seemed out of date; the wealth and power of the governing race required a more artistic finish and a wider culture, such as only Greece was competent to give. It is true that the pretensions and the self-assertions of the petty Hellenic commonwealths seemed ridiculous enough to Roman eyes, now that they had ceased to breed a race of soldiers to defend them; they soon grew weary of appeals to rights that were not based upon material strength, and trampled them down at last with insolent disdain of justice. But humbled as she was beneath her conqueror's feet, she gained ere long a wider influence than ever, and exchanged an intellectual supremacy for national freedom. Some of the foremost families of Rome, like the circle of the great Scipio, the conqueror of Carthage, set the stamp of their approval on the foreign culture, invited men of learning to their homes, filled their galleries with Hellenic works of art, and tried to naturalize the liberal studies upon Roman soil.

But Greek thought was a powerful solvent, which had spared at home none of the creeds and institutions of the past; its merciless logic had disposed of the legendary fancies of the people's worship, had called in question every local usage and every venerable phrase, till those convictions only could survive which were not reasonable only, but were based on conscious reason. At Rome under the new influence

the process was repeated. In the national religion, as far as it was of genuine home growth, there was far less for the critical spirit to attack.

The Italian deities were abstractions of the reason, not clothed with poetic shapes by any personifying fancy, nor invested with the passions or caprices of our human nature. They gave rise therefore to no legendary fictions, such as might embarrass the piety of a later and reflecting age. There was no dogmatic creed for criticism to examine, but there were ceremonial usages to be observed, and formularies to be guarded from neglect, and time-honoured methods for interpreting the will of heaven. There was nothing in all this, as in the mythology of Homer and of Hesiod, that conflicted with the moral instincts of a later age, but it was too soulless and mechanical a round of forms to satisfy the spiritual needs, or to inform the conscience when it really wanted light or help. For rules of duty, men had looked not to Religion but to Law. Devotion to their country had supplied them with an animating motive, which had transfigured the selfishness of private action; the early training, the statute book, and the opinion of the world supplied the customary rules which sufficed for all the common wants of life. But in the later days of Rome these sources and sanctions of the moral law spoke with an uncertain sound; wider experience and fuller thought brought many an inconsistency to light which had been unseen before, and where authority might be turned against itself, it remained only for reason to decide.

Men naturally turned to the newly-imported theories which professed to give help and guidance in such questions, but the Roman had little taste for abstract speculations, and turned impatiently away from everything that seemed like transcendental metaphysics. It was the practical side only of the systems which attracted his attention, and of this even he absorbed only so much as was congenial to his nature. The great philosophies of Plato and of Aristotle had lost their freshness and their power even on their native soil, and no serious attempt was made to carry them across the seas; and they remained almost to the last unknown, except in fragmentary forms, to Roman readers. The New Academy, with its refined scepticism and balanced state of intellectual suspense, was acceptable enough to dilettanti students, familiar with all the learning of the schools, and indifferent to the wants of work-day life; but it would not bear transplanting, and it seemed for the most part heartless trifling to the ruder natures trained on coarser food.

The system of Epicurus had an ugly sound, and appeared like a mere apology for self-indulgence to those who did not weigh all its reserves and definitions. Its founder lived indeed a pure and blameless life, and the pleasure which he advocated was a glad serenity unruffled by the gusts of passion, and only possible for thoughtful and well-ordered souls. But there was nothing earnest or manly in its creed; nothing to brace the moral energies for conflict with life's dangers or temptations, or to speak to the

irresolute conscience with the trumpet tones of duty. It had no faith in the moral government of the world, or in a personal immortality; and resolving as it did the powers of heaven into such stuff as dreams are made of, it came into rude collision with the popular worship, and awoke against itself both the suspicions of the governing classes and the hostility of serious minds.

It was far otherwise with the stern doctrines of the Porch, which were more akin to the Roman type of character than to the Greek itself. Its theories of Order and of Providence were suited to a law-making and an organizing race; its allegorizing method respected the names and attributes of the national Pantheon, while it reconciled them with its own conception of the great World-spirit, varying constantly its moods in an endless series of emanations. Its tones of paradox, indeed, and its uncompromising theory had a startling effect at first when they fell upon unaccustomed ears. We read that when the famous embassy was sent from Athens in which the heads of the leading philosophic schools took part, one of the chief magistrates asked the following question in the presence of the Senate,—"Is it true, Carneades, that you hold that I am not a prætor, because I am not a sage, and that this is not a city, and that there is no true state in it?" Carneades in answer said, "I do not think so, but this Stoic does," turning to Diogenes, who stood beside him. The anecdote may serve to illustrate the bewilderment which the trenchant language of the

Porch occasioned, and the seeming boldness of its claims to set its wise man high above the rulers of the earth. But by 150 B.C., the higher circles of society at Rome had grown familiar with its tenets. Panætius of Rhodes, its most eminent professor, moved among the group which surrounded the great Scipio, attending him on his travels as a companion and a friend, as in his mission to the courts of Asia. He softened down the harsher tones, and dwelt upon the practical aspects of the creed, to the exclusion of all that might appear as arid dialectic or extravagant extremes. At the same time he gave his teaching a more attractive shape by his appeals to the opinions and authority of earlier thinkers, as especially of Plato, whom he styled the very Homer of philosophers. The example of Scipio was followed by many others of the leading nobles, and it soon became a common practice for every great mansion to include its cultivated Greeks, half-friends, half-clients, who as poets, moralists, or rhetoricians instructed or amused their wealthy patrons, and gave to the social intercourse about them a learned tone and literary finish. To these, perhaps, the circle of the Gracchi owed much of its wide ympathies and humanitarian aims, and some of them at least had no wish to survive the fall of the statesmen whom they had encouraged with their counsels. As the times grew darker in the age of revolution, and serious minds began to brood increasingly upon the graver themes of politics and morals, the fashion also grew for every great house to have its own philosopher, or moralist as we may call

him, as a sort of domestic chaplain or confessor. That the choice was often made with care we may infer from the story of the younger Cato, who is said by Plutarch to have travelled all the way to Pergamus to invite the Stoic doctor Athenodorus to his house, where once installed he remained to end his days. Other systems, of course, found their adherents, and the poem of Lucretius remains as a lasting monument of the hold of Epicurean tenets upon some Roman minds; but the followers of the Porch outnumbered all the rest, and from them the favourite legal studies soon received a definite stamp and scientific shape which was of great moment in the history of later jurisprudence.

For a century and more, however, men were content to hear these subjects orally discussed by foreign teachers, or to read about them in Greek text-books; till the time of Cicero, scarcely an attempt was made to introduce them to a wider circle in a Latin dress; and Cicero himself first formed acquaintance with these studies as a convenient source of illustration or an exercise of dialectic skill. In later life, when untoward conditions forced him to retire awhile from the political arena, he sought distraction in philosophy, and rapidly produced a number of treatises on the most important questions, which were often little more than free translations from the Greek, though the style, selection, and illustrations were his own. Two of these, especially, reflect the doctrines of the Porch, and are of interest to us as showing that in the judgment of the writer, who was no Stoic

by profession, but inclined by temper rather to a state of Academic doubt, no other rule of life had such high claims as theirs for sterling value, and none was so suitable for Roman study. The work upon Propriety of Conduct ("De Officiis") is based confessedly upon a treatise of Panætius, while containing references to other doctors of the school, such as Antipater and Posidonius. In it Stoicism poses as a philosophy of common sense, employed in the service of a high ideal, and dropping all its airs of paradox; though tending somewhat to casuistical discussion in its effort to be practically useful, and hinting perhaps to worldly ears that it might be possible to combine a high degree of theoretic rigour with some complaisant indulgence in details.

The other writing, called "Tusculan Disputations," deals with some of the great questions of the Stoa; such as the proper attitude in face of death, and pain, and sorrow, and other emotions of the soul, but in a more meditative and abstracted vein, avoiding all extravagance of language, and tempering the tenets of the school with liberal doses of Platonic thought. They may seem but common places to us as we read them in these calmer days, after centuries of moralizing have worn the themes threadbare. But they had a real value for the author, who turned to the lessons of philosophy for comfort and courage in those evil days. They were not mere empty phrases of conventional rhetoric for the republicans who read them on the eve of the proscriptions, and who found in them arguments and illustrations of patient resig-

nation and heroic courage. Even Atticus, Epicurean as he was, wrote to his friend to tell him that he felt a new fire and energy as he turned over those pages. Indifference to death was in part the burden of its teaching; and the counsel fell in those days on willing ears, for they received it often, not as a theme for mystic meditation, but as an encouragement to withdraw from the scene without delay. At each crisis of the civil wars we read of a long list of suicides among the champions of the fallen cause; the facts of history thus form a melancholy comment on the pages of the moralist, and throw a lurid light upon the words that else might seem to Christian eyes like the mere idle sophistry of morbid rhetoric.

There was one contemporary figure, the most famous Stoic of the age, the younger Cato, who shows us in a striking form the strength and weakness of the standard by which he ruled his life. No one had more than he the courage to avow his principles and act up to his convictions; in an age of political corruption there was no stain upon his honour; and his moral influence, when once exerted to check the bribery of candidates for office, did more, we are told, than all the laws and penal sanctions which enforced them. In the worst crisis of the revolution, when the spirits of other men were soured, and the party cries grew fiercer, his temper seemed to become gentler, and to forbode the miseries of civil war. Inflexible before, he pleaded for concessions to avert the storm; and when they were refused, he raised his voice still for moderate counsels,

and spoke to unwilling ears of the claims of humanity and mercy. He struggled on, while hope remained, fearlessly and consistently in what he thought the cause of right and order; and when at last that cause seemed ruined irretrievably, he calmly prepared to leave the scene where he could no longer act with self-respect, talking as he died upon the soul's immortal hopes, and the freedom which the wise man only can enjoy. Imperialism suffered more, perhaps, from the protest of that voluntary death than from anything which he had done during his lifetime; and the conqueror thought it needful, while the burden of a subject world lay upon his shoulders, to pen himself a literary answer to the praises which passed from mouth to mouth as well as to the more elaborate panegyrics on the dead.[1]

And yet, withal, the strength of the theories of life which he embodied seemed to lie overmuch in their powers of resistance, and to lack adaptiveness to new conditions. There were a pedantry and formalism in his adherence to the antiquated maxims which were wholly unsuited to the experience of his times, a blindness in his reverence for an inelastic system which made him constantly the dupe of his own hollow and pretentious phrases. The old constitution lay a-dying, for friends and foes alike had dealt it many a death-blow, but Cato clung to it as though the wit of man could not devise a better system, or without it save the cause of social order. Political

[1] The "Anti-Cato" of Julius Cæsar.

action cannot be successful without allowance for varieties of temper, and delicate tact in noticing the shifting currents of opinion, and some willingness to give and take in the necessary play of mutual compromises and concessions. Cato, perhaps, was hampered by the associations of his name, which made him narrow his cosmopolitan ideal to the picture of the stubborn old republican who had made his family illustrious in an earlier age. But the tenets of the Porch seem responsible in part for his failure as a statesman. They encouraged him in his contempt for the opinion of the ignorant public, and nursed his pride of haughty opposition. They made it seem a weakness to give way on any point; as if every rule were alike sacred, and nothing could be yielded without a sacrifice of principle or courage. They made him wrap himself too ostentatiously in the cloak of his own virtue, identify complacently his cause with that of right, and pride himself on his defiance of the passions and unreason of weak men.

Mommsen, the learned historian of Rome, after describing the introduction of the new theories of ethics a century before the end of the Republic, says, in a mocking spirit, that with all their show of popularity the practical results were hardly more than this, that "two or three noble houses lived on poor fare to please the Stoa." He speaks again of the reaction against the fashionable system of philosophy during the long agony of the civil wars, and of the antipathy among men of intellectual vigour to the pretentiousness of Pharisaic phrases, "coupled, doubtless, with

the increasing disposition to take refuge from practical life in indolent apathy or empty irony, that occasioned during this epoch the extension of the system of Epicurus to a larger circle."[1] It is probable that the historian somewhat underrates the moral influence of theories for which he has so little sympathy himself; but, indeed, in that exceptional age of social dissolution and upheaval, men would be more likely to listen to the cry, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die," or be prompted to parade a sceptical indifference or cynical despair.

But the writer does not speak so lightly of the influence of Cato's name and character upon the following generation. "The unrelenting warfare which the ghost of the legitimate republic waged for centuries, from Cassius and Brutus down to Thrasea and Tacitus, nay, even far later, against the Cæsarian monarchy—a warfare of plots and of literature—was the legacy which the dying Cato bequeathed to his enemies. This republican opposition borrowed from Cato its whole attitude—stately, transcendental in its rhetoric, pretentiously rigid, hopeless, and faithful to death; and, accordingly, it began even immediately after his death to revere as a saint the man who in his lifetime was not unfrequently its laughing-stock and scandal."[2]

But though the din of civil wars may have made it hard for any but a Cato or a Brutus to calmly meditate on abstract questions, there can be no doubt

[1] Mommsen. English translation, iv. 2, p. 560.

[2] Ibid., p. 449.

that the victories of Pharsalia and Philippi, disastrous as they were to the republican traditions, favoured the spread of philosophic thought. The minds that were weary of the turbulence and strife, and could find no more an outlet for their energies in the affairs of State, turned often with new interest to the theories of morals for which they had found no leisure in more stirring times. The sentiments and standards of their class or party were fatally discredited by recent failure, and many a serious inquirer turned to seek after a new creed or a better rule of life. The heavier the burden of Imperial rule, and the more stifling the official air in senate, law courts, or the streets of Rome, the greater the inducement to explore the resources of the inner life, and retire within the citadel of self, where alone shone the light of freedom.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CRITICS AND ENEMIES OF STOICISM UNDER THE EARLY EMPIRE.

As in the middle and the higher classes of society at Rome in the first century of the Empire the moral tone became more serious and sad, men turned, as we have seen, with enthusiasm to the doctrines of the Porch as to a religious creed, and literature is full of the testimony both of friends and foes to the wide-spread and enduring nature of the movement. Satire soon found out the weak points of the system which might be assailed with most advantage, and made merry with Varro over the pedantry of phrase and verbal quibbles, or amused itself with Horace at the paradox that all crimes were of equal dye, and that it therefore was as great a fault to spoil a neighbour's garden-stuff as to commit a robbery in holy places. To the votary of moderation, trying to reduce tact and good sense to a system, it seemed a very proper jest to hear the Stoics talk in their pretentious way of the wise man who was master of all learning, high and low, and every virtue, blessing, and accomplishment to boot. And so, perhaps, we might conceive a scholar and gentleman of Corinth who had strayed unawares into the midst of the little Christian flock while the letters of St. Paul were being read, finding

it hard to understand the writer when he spoke in his strange way of himself, "as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." For Christian mysticism has its paradoxes many, and they are foolishness to those who know them not.

The men of the world again, who recognised the worth of everything that had a money value, but who were seldom haunted by the thought of anything much better than themselves—they were impatient at this talk of the self-sufficiency of virtue, and the indifference to the gifts of fortune, and of sublime ideals of perfection. If any one spoke in their hearing of the need of meditating more on the great themes of human destiny and duty, they were likely enough to answer in the words which Persius puts into the mouth of one of the brawny centurions of common life:—"I am quite content with what I know already; I have no mind to be like an Arcesilas or woe-begone old Solon, to walk with head awry, and eyes fastened on the ground, mumbling to himself or working with his mouth in silence like a madman, or thrusting out his lips as though to weigh his words, pondering on such stuff as a dotard's dreams are made of, as that nothing can come forth from nothing, and into nothing nothing can return. Is it to study this you look so pale, or is this worth giving up a single meal?"[1]

[1] Persius, "Satires," iii. 77–85.

The seeming affectation of their dress and demeanour gave offence, and the sight of the philosophic staff and mantle, the close-cropped hair and studious look often was a signal for much ignorant banter of the crowd, somewhat as in Christian lands there have been times and places when the friar's cowl or tonsure has provoked coarse sarcasm or an outburst, even, of unreasoning hate.

Yet there was some excuse perhaps for such unfavourable judgments in the fact that gross deceivers often donned the cloak of the philosopher, and dealt in sanctimonious phrases, while they dragged their high profession through the mire of sensuality and licence. For hypocrisy is of all times; and every lofty creed, in its heyday of popularity and sunshine, will have its dark shadows and its unclean growth of things that cannot bear the light. No wonder if many an honest formula gave out a suspicious ring to undiscerning ears, and sounded painfully like Pharisaic boasting, when notorious scandals of the kind lingered in the public memory, and became stock examples for the satirists' pages. No wonder if the careless livers, whose worldliness was visibly reproached by all austerities of practice, exaggerated the occasional abuses; as grave delinquencies among monastic orders furnished an excuse for general outcries of intolerance. They mocked loudly at the would-be sages who talked so grandly of the contempt for riches and for glory, and of treating the great ones of the earth as equals, while yet they wanted a fee for every lesson, and were ready to do homage to

the rich. They gladly welcomed bitter words like those of Lucian, who speaks of the professional moralists as "greedy of lucre, more passionate than dogs, more cowardly than hares, more lascivious than asses, more thievish than cats, more quarrelsome than cocks."

But there were more adverse influences to face than such opposition of an ignorant public. The literary and official classes looked with an evil eye upon the speculations which set up a rival influence to their own, and tempted men to linger in the new paths of ascetic aims and mystic aspirations. The old quarrel between philosophers and sophists which dated from the days of Socrates and Plato, was renewed in new scenes and under different names, but the principles at issue were the same. To the phrase-mongers and the rhetoricians who were busy with the graces of style and arts of culture, philosophy appeared like a sour pedant, whose narrow rules and pedagogic airs were repugnant to all true refinement. She angered them with her pretensions to sit in judgment on the moral life, and to dictate as to what was and what was not men's duty. Thus to the rhetorician Fronto, his own favourite art seemed the only serious study of the age.[1] "For philosophy," he thought, "no style was needed, no laboured periods, nor touching peroration. The student's intellect was scarcely ruffled while the lecturer went droning on in the dull level of his tedious

[1] "Age of the Antonines," p. 183.

disquisitions. Lazy assent or a few lifeless words alone were needed, and the audience might be even half-asleep while the *firstly* and *secondly* were leisurely set forth, and truisms disguised in learned phrases. That done, the scholar's work was over; no conning over tasks by night, no reciting or declaiming, no careful study of the power of synonyms or the methods of translation." He thought it mere pretension of philosophy to claim the sphere of morals for its special care. The domain of rhetoric was wide enough to cover that, as well as many another field of thought; her mission was to touch the feelings and to guide men by persuasive speech. For words were something infinitely sacred, too precious to be trifled with by any bungler in the art of speaking. As for the thoughts, they were not likely to be wanting if only the terms of oratory were fitly chosen.

Quintilian, the celebrated critic, who made the practice and theory of rhetoric his familiar study, was quite as bitter in his antipathy as Fronto. To him it also seemed that moral questions belonged to his own domain by natural right, and that it was insufferable pride on the part of any school of abstract thought to claim the monopoly of such important subjects. The good man was the true sage, he thought, and in a matter so intensely practical there could be no need of fine-drawn speculations.

Lucian, writing as a man of letters, takes another line for his attack, without however quite disdaining the use of arguments already stated. The Hermotimus of his dialogue is a student of ripe age, who

had followed for twenty years with laborious anxiety the tenets of the Stoa, and yet was but a learner still, and did not count himself already perfect. In as many years again he hopes, perhaps, to attain to his ideal, to despise the transitory vanities of life, and rise above the sordid impulses of anger and of grief, like the doctor whose lectures he attends. His friend, Lycinus, when he hears these gushing phrases, maliciously reminds him of a scene which he had witnessed when the sage in question was dragging before a magistrate one of his slippery disciples who would not pay his fee, and so violent was his fit of passion that he almost strangled him with his own hands by the way.

He tells Hermotimus that he need be in no hurry to attend the morning's lecture, for the learned doctor had made too free the day before on the occasion of a birthday festival, and was obliged to have a notice pasted up that he could not preach as usual that morning. Then dropping such coarse banter for a while, he asks his friend why Stoicism had been chosen out of such a multitude of rival systems, for it could not be seriously thought that popularity, or grand professions, or the solemn airs of the philosophers themselves could weigh much with a man of sense in his choice of a spiritual guide. To illustrate the embarrassments of a decision he goes on in figurative style:—"Virtue, we will suppose, is like a city whose inhabitants enjoy unclouded happiness, as your teacher who has reached it would describe, having attained to perfect wisdom; brave, just, and

temperate without alloy, they are almost in a word divine. The theft and violence and greed we see around us here are banished from that happy city where men live in peace and harmony together. All that excites strife and rivalry in other towns, the gold and pleasures and vain-glory that might stir dissension in their midst, have been swept away as idle vanities, and life is therefore calm and happy under the sanction of good laws, and in the midst of equality and freedom. What more natural than that every one should wish to be a citizen of such a State, and should not heed the weariness upon the road, or be discouraged by the time the journey takes, if he can only get a resting-place assigned him and gain the status of a citizen? I remember hearing an old man long ago describe the way to get admission there; he was to guide me on the road, and get me the privilege of the franchise, and find me a place even in his own ward that I might share the general bliss. I was but fifteen years of age, but I was already in the suburbs, almost entering on the promised land. My old friend told me, if I remember rightly, that in that city all the inhabitants are aliens by birth who have come to it from other lands; they are barbarians, slaves, humpbacks, dwarfs, or paupers; any one who will may be enrolled without regard to fortune, birth, or dress, or shape, or looks, for those things do not matter. To become a citizen one need only be intelligent, desire the good, work hard, spurn pleasure, and faint not or give way before the many hardships on the road. He who can prove that these

qualities are his, and can travel over the whole way that leads there, has won his title to the franchise, whatever he may be in other ways, and will be placed on the same level as the rest. If the city were but full in view and near at hand, be sure that I should long since have made it my abode. But it is far away, and the road needs careful search and guidance. A multitude of folks profess to act as guides, and say they know the way that leads there. But they do not point to one and the same route, but to many different paths which have no connection with each other. One seems to lead you to the West, another to the East, this one leads South, and that goes North. One winds over the meadows and through shady groves, where all is fresh and charming and there is no hardship for the traveller; another lies over rough and stony ground, exposed to the full glare of the sun, and they that journey there grow faint and parched. Yet all profess to lead to the same city. It bewilders me to find that at every road I pass there is some one standing at the entrance beckoning to me with an air of certainty, and telling me to follow him with confidence, for he, and he alone, knows the right way, while all the rest are blundering and will never reach the city, for they would not follow the right guidance. If I listen to the next, I hear only the same offers and the same reproaches, and so on, till I cannot tell what road to take or whom to trust to show the way."

Hermotimus sees, of course, the meaning of the figure, and assures his friend that if he were to listen

to every preacher in his turn he would never find a safer or more experienced guidance than from the doctors of the Porch, and that the only way to reach the realms of virtue was to follow Zenon and Chrysippus. But Lycinus replies, "Suppose, my friend, that I were to listen only to the prompting of affection and to follow your advice, who know nothing but the Stoic dogmas, and have never travelled by another route, if any God were to recall to life Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle and the rest, and they were to come round and ply me with importunate questions, 'What reason, or whose authority, friend Lycinus, has made you prefer Zenon and Chrysippus to ourselves, who are so much more venerable than they, dating as they do from yesterday, and that without a word to us, or getting any knowledge of our systems?' Would it be enough to urge that I had full confidence in the advice of Hermotimus? I am sure that they would say in answer, 'We have no idea for our part who your Hermotimus is, and on his side he knows us no better. But you should not pass your judgment on us on the evidence of a man who knows only one path in philosophy, and has not even thoroughly explored that one. Lawgivers, my friend, do not give their sanction to the jury if they act in that way and only listen to one party in a trial without allowing the other side to speak. They require them to hear both sides in turn, and weigh their words impartially that they may distinguish truth and falsehood."

The dialogue continues for some time in this strain, with many ingenious arguments and illustrations, but

the burden is the same throughout, that the wider the experience men have of philosophic systems, the more hopeless they will feel of attaining absolute truth, seeing that the would-be teachers are so many, and their theories so conflicting, and their pretensions so arrogantly exclusive.

From other quarters came pretensions of a more utilitarian nature. In the numerous schools of declamation, when the growing youth was trained in the fence of words and all the artifices of debate, it was a favourite practice, we are told, to propose to the ingenious students the following subject for debate :—A father had three sons, who chose for their several professions philosophy, rhetoric, and medicine. When he died he left the bulk of his substance to that one of his children who could prove his own profession to be the most useful to the State. The teachers who had no love for abstract speculation gladly took the opportunity to develope all their common-places about the utter uselessness of what they termed such cobwebs of airy metaphysics. And so, in a later age, we find that Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, the philosophic prince, was despised as a mere book-worm by the hardy soldier Avidius Cassius, who at length rose in revolt against him. In a letter to his son-in-law, which is still preserved, he wrote in characteristic language on the subject :—"Where is Cato, the old censor? where are the strict rules of ancient times? They are vanished long ago, and no one dreams of reviving them again, for our prince spends his time in star-gazing, in fine talk about the elements and the

human soul, in questions of justice and of honour, but neglects the interests of State meanwhile."

Less prejudiced writers, though in more moderate language, drew the same conclusions, and spoke like Tacitus of all such studies as suitable enough for early youth, as a sort of intellectual gymnastic, but as quite unbecoming in maturer years; or like Pliny the younger, praised such of their friends as proved in the conduct of their life a piety, strength of mind, or justice quite as great as that of any of the professors of philosophy, and yet did not haunt the colonnades or lecture-rooms, to waste their time in endless disputations, but were always to be seen in their official dress in close attention to the affairs of State. It was evident that large-minded, cultivated men, who had no lack of interest in moral questions, looked with some misgiving at the growing popularity of the doctrines of the Porch, which tended to distract men's thoughts from the heat and press of active life, and led them to look for satisfaction in a sort of cloistered virtue, full of fine thoughts about their personal salvation, but of slight value to the struggling world below. The familiar arguments which have been so often urged in Christian lands against the spread of the conventual system find some sort of parallel in the protests raised among the pagan society of Rome, that public duties were neglected and the responsibilities of workday life disparaged by the many votaries of mystic contemplation.

These motives among others may probably have influenced the ruling powers of Rome, which often

looked with marked disfavour on the philosophic sects, and among them regarded with especial rancour the chief members of the Stoic school. But more often, probably, this argument was urged as an excuse to disguise less creditable motives, and it may be of interest to enter into more details upon the subject, and to illustrate the mutual relations of the Imperial governors towards the tenets and professors of the Porch. We have spoken already of the influence on succeeding generations of the protest of Cato's voluntary death. But for some time at least it was as republican, rather than as philosopher, that his memory was revered or hated, and the early Empire showed for half a century no suspicion of free thought, and did not realize that there was any danger in it, either to itself or to the institutions which it sheltered. Augustus lived himself on terms of intimacy with noted Stoics, and entrusted the young Claudius to their care. Dion Cassius, it is true, in the warning which he puts into the mouth of his minister and confidant Mæcenas, makes him dwell upon the necessary limits to such toleration :—"Many of those who call themselves philosophers lead men astray to dangerous innovations, it is well to be upon your guard in dealing with them. For though Arius and Athenodorus have been proved to be men of honour, yet it must not be supposed that all who call themselves the same are really like them. For under the cloak of that profession many knaves bring infinite misfortune on the State, as well as on their dupes." But Dion here gives expression to the fears of later

rulers, and Augustus, like his immediate successors, looked with apparent unconcern upon the spread of the Stoics, as of other sects.

But in the days of Nero the Imperial attitude was wholly changed; the leading Stoics of the age were struck down by the strong hand of power, while philosophy in general was put under a ban, which was renewed from time to time, and was not finally removed till the tyranny of Domitian was over. The persecution had not in Nero's case at least the excuse of ignorant hatred, for he had been trained himself in early years to follow the moral speculations of his teachers, till his mother stepped in to forbid the studies as unworthy of a man of rank. His adviser, Seneca, who held the reins for him in his first years of government, had drunk deeply at the fountain-head of Stoic thought, and it had been one of the first signs of the emperor's wanton humour that he loved to gather round him at his table professors of the various schools of thought, and to make merry with the hot disputes of their interminable dialectic. But in the year 59 A.D. the system of persecution was begun. If we may believe the somewhat questionable evidence in the memoirs of Apollonius of Tyana, the charge of sorcery and magic was brought against the seekers after wisdom, some of whom were dragged before the courts, while others fled away from Rome before the storm; yet to the honour of the thinkers it is said that most of them stayed bravely at their post and were true to their convictions. One of the adherents of the Porch, indeed, Egnatius Celer,

basely turned against his friend and pupil Barea Soranus, and worked his ruin by his lying charges, but the indignation roused was loud and deep, and the treachery is spoken of as quite unique in the annals of the sect. For some years the attacks were made on the representative men of different systems as they caught the emperor's jealous eye, or as his vile favourite, Tigellinus, dropped the seeds of suspicion in his ears, but it was specially among the ranks of the great Stoics that tyranny made havoc. Rubellius Plautus, the powerful pro-consul; Seneca, the famous minister and moralist; and Pætus Thrasea, one of the most commanding figures of the age, were among the foremost of the victims to the tyrant's hate or fear, and a crowd of less illustrious martyrs followed, among whom many a noble woman showed by word or deed that the austere lessons of the school had passed out of the domain of theory, and had stamped themselves as living truths upon her heart.

At last came a general edict of proscription, which only heralded, however, Nero's headlong fall. But the example was a fatal one to tempt the caprice of absolute power. Vespasian, in his turn, sorely irritated by the contumacious words of Helvidius Priscus, the stiffnecked son-in-law of Pætus, and goaded by the prompting of his chief adviser, Mucianus, put for a while at least the Stoic and the Cynic sects under the ban, and made Helvidius pay with his life the penalty of his bold bearing. Vespasian soon rued his fatal weakness; but Domitian, the moody tyrant, had less scruple, and in his hatred of free thought

he forbade entirely the teaching of philosophy, and drove the professors forth from Rome. We may well ask what were the causes of this bitter hostility and persecution.

It might seem at first sight that there could be little in the Stoic creed which could bring its votaries into rude collision with the ruling powers. It had a marked tendency, as we have seen, to wean men from the cares of public life, and in evil days to make them find a solace and distraction in the indulgence of a tranquil meditation. As in Christian times the retirement to the cloister seemed to end the danger from a disturber of the public peace, so it might be thought that the staff and mantle of philosophy would set at rest for ever all fears of revolutionary action from those who had embraced the spiritual life. The Empire posed, indeed, as the defender of the faith, and threw its protection round the forms of the established Church, and as such might fear the insidious action of free thought. But of all systems Stoicism at the first could be harmonized most easily with the old Italian creed, and through its principles of allegory could explain without excessive boldness even the later fancies of the Hellenic myths. To this it may be also added, that unbelieving rulers have often patronized religion in the interests of policy, as checking the passions of the vulgar through the influence of fear; and Stoicism took the place to many hearts of a kind of religious creed, and threw all its authority into the scale of

social order. As such it might seem a natural ally, to be courted rather than regarded with an evil eye by all good governors.

There is some weight in such considerations, but we must not insist on them too strongly. For Stoicism, when it was transplanted to the soil of Rome, dropped much of its negative and transcendental language, and became more practical and energetic. The Empire of Rome was wide enough to satisfy its cosmopolitan ideal; its business was to find or put enough of pure reason into the organization of the State to meet the aspirations of the sage, and to enable him to take his part in public life without any sacrifice of self-respect. The most famous names upon its roll of martyrs were the generals and statesmen who had not despaired of the grossness of the world, or withdrawn their vital energies from active work.

Mysticism, too, has at other times, we may remember, given umbrage to the temporal power. The Christian Quietists of the last century were silenced harshly with all the rigour of the law, and an absolute King of France was urgent to condemn what cardinals and popes would have willingly ignored. The language of disinterested love seemed fatal heresy to the defenders of the orthodox faith; rulers and priests, who relied exclusively on the influence of constraint and fear as moral engines, would make no terms with the enthusiasts who relied upon affection, and who would fain merge all their selfish

hopes and fears in the sublime ecstasies of adoration. There was extravagance, doubtless, in the language of Madame Guyon and her friends which might well awaken grave mistrust in calmer minds; there might seem some disparagement of the ceremonial forms of the religious life with which a humble piety could not dispense; and so, too, the language of the Roman Stoics, with its rhapsodies about the world-spirit and the universal reason, and the truths which were veiled from careless eyes by the child-like fancies of the poets, might well sound like an attack upon the people's faith, which was the more dangerous because its spirit was intensely earnest, and not like the frivolous indifference of dilettanti sceptics. A Nero or Domitian, indeed, are not to be compared in orthodox feeling with a Louis XIV. of France, but the Imperial *régime* began with the revival of the popular religion; the rulers were themselves the supreme pontiffs, and favourites and ministers were probably not slow to turn such arguments to good account when they wished to crush a rival influence too near the throne.

Could any of the courtiers have been present at the literary gatherings before which the young Stoic Persius read his second satire, they might have found some of his shafts of ridicule come home to their own hearts, while others were aimed at the superstitions of the people. The poet has no mercy on the hypocrites who pray with bated breath for favours which they dare not own to other men, and so make their prayers an insult to the gods they worship; but

he deals in gentler style with the ignorant fancies of the masses :[1]—

> Lo ! from his little crib the grandam hoar,
> Or aunt, well-vers'd in superstitious lore,
> Snatches the babe ; in lustral spittle dips
> Her middle finger, and anoints his lips
> And forehead. "Charms of potency," she cries,
> "To break the influence of evil eyes."
> The spell complete, she dandles high in air
> Her starveling hope, and breathes a humble prayer
> That heaven would only tender to his hands
> All Crassus's houses, all Licinus's lands !
> Let every gazer by his charms be won,
> And kings and queens aspire to call him son.

He exposes the folly of believing that the favour of Heaven can be bought by costly gifts :—

> O grovelling souls, and void of things divine,
> Why bring our passions to the immortal shrine,
> And judge from what this carnal sense delights
> Of what is pleasing in their purer sights ?

At last he ends in the accents of true spiritual faith,—

> No ! let me bring the immortals, what the race
> Of great Messala, now depraved and base,
> On their huge charger cannot ; bring a mind,
> Where legal and where moral sense are join'd
> With the pure essence ; holy thoughts, that dwell
> In the soul's most retired and sacred cell ;
> A bosom dyed in honour's noblest grain—
> Deep dyed—with these let me approach the fane,
> And heaven will hear the humble prayer I make,
> Though all my offering be a barley-cake.

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[1] Persius. Translation by Gifford, ii. 53.

But the real motives of the Imperial hatred are not perhaps so far to seek, and were connected with the more superficial features of the sect. The attitude which they assumed on moral questions, their stern, uncompromising language, which knew no respect of persons, and which seemed to make all distinctions between man and man of trifling value as compared with the momentous difference between the few wise and the many foolish: their unbending dogmatism and stiff-necked assertion of their spiritual freedom; these were of themselves enough to make them odious to vicious rulers, and to supply the wish, though not perhaps the occasion, for attack. Their favourite phrases about the Divine right of the wise man to govern sounded like a covert satire on the unreason of the Cæsar on the throne; they had no mind like the flatterers of the court to canonize their ruler or condone his vices; they were too proud to catch the tones and copy the fashions of the palace, so their bearing, whether that of manly self-respect or of Pharisaic self-complacency, made them often seem like Mordecai by the gate. There were some, moreover, who did not confine themselves to general language, but showed a foolish pride in braving the displeasure of the ruling powers. The Cynic leaven still was working in the Stoic sect, and there were preachers of morality among them who paraded their independence both in and out of season, and mistook insolence for manly freedom. We may illustrate this practice by a story of Cornutus, who was summoned to a sort of Privy Council called by

Nero, to advise him, when he thought of writing a poetic history of Rome. They discussed the number of the books of which the poem should consist, and some courtiers would have it that four hundred would not be too many for so great a subject. Cornutus remonstrated loudly, saying, that no one would read a work of such a portentous length. "Yet Chrysippus wrote far more," was urged by some objector. "True," was the critic's answer, "but then what he wrote was at least of some use to mankind."

Yet few, perhaps, carried their audacity to such lengths as Demetrius the Cynic, who even in the baths lately built by Nero declaimed against the luxury of which such buildings were the proof, sparing no rank in his indiscriminate invective, and answering the emperor's threats with bold defiance. He seems, however, to have been regarded as a privileged railer, for he escaped with life, though he did his best to irritate the ruling powers. When Vespasian passed by as he was lying on the ground, we read, he would not rise to greet him, but only recognised his presence with a gibe; to which the emperor replied with patience, "You wish to provoke me, Demetrius, to passion, but I do not care to crush a yelping hound."

But it was not till Nero was far advanced upon the path of tyranny and had stained his hands with his mother's blood, that hatred or fear at last provoked him to deeds of violence against the leading Stoics. They were the Puritans of the society of

Rome, who were known to frown at all his frivolous pursuits, and sternly to reprobate his cruel caprices. There were philosophic circles in the society of Rome, to which Cornutus gave the tone, and where a sympathizing audience heard the young Persius read his satires, applauding in them many a caustic reference to the vices in high places and the frivolous fashions set by Nero's court. The common-places of the Porch were charged with all the bitterness of personal contempt, and informers were not slow to trace or to imagine the political allusions in many a diatribe upon the follies of the age.

When cringing spirits fawned and flattered, and humoured or encouraged the despot's whims in the senate or the council chamber, the Stoics at least protested by their silence or withdrawal from the scene; they were thought, some of them, to be Republicans at heart, they were known, at least, to be the centre of a sort of constitutional opposition, however mild and faint its efforts; if there were to be a cry of revolution, it would come most likely from their ranks, and among them, as the noblest and the most respected, a national leader would be found, such as a Plautus or a Thrasea, to whom men turned with wondering looks to see how far their toleration would be carried. It was rumoured that some of them observed in solemn state the birthdays of Brutus or of Cassius, who had murdered the first Cæsar; others spoke of Cato as the noblest model for a Roman, and such sentiments might one day prompt them to pass from theory to vigorous action. At last a wide-

spread conspiracy was traced against the emperor's life; among the accused were some at least of the chief Stoic circles, though as a party they had held aloof; there were other plots, too, in the air, for the murmurs of discontent were loud and deep, and it seemed to be time to strike down the prominent malcontents, and to provide for safety by a reign of terror.

The most commanding figure among those martyrs of free thought was Thrasea Pætus, and a few details about his life and social bearing may illustrate the influence of the Stoic creed upon the practical statesmen of the age, and its relations in such cases to the Imperial *régime*. His birth-place, Padua, had the reputation of preserving much of the austerer virtue of the old Italian type, which had given place commonly to sensuality and licence, but he left it in early life for Rome, where he gave himself to philosophic studies, with no wish to forsake the world, but to play his part in it with greater credit, in the high place to which his wealth and noble parentage entitled him. His wife Arria was the daughter of the heroine of the same name of whom the famous story has been told that when her husband was condemned to death, she would not be left to live alone, but showed him how to die when the fatal moment came, plunging first the dagger into her own breast, and then handing it to him with the words, "See Pætus, it does not hurt." Thrasea lived on terms of intimacy with the notabilities of Rome, attaching to himself especially the more earnest spirits of the age, such as Musonius Rufus and Demetrius, and the poet

Persius. Like Cato of Utica, to whose life he devoted careful study, he tried to turn his moral theories to good account in public life, regarding the proper organization of the State as the primary condition of all moral progress; while the first duty of the citizen consisted in helping to reform the evil, and in raising the tone of social thought. But he was no strict martinet, or gloomy pedant with an intellectual horizon bounded by a narrow range of rules. He was very tender and considerate in word and deed, fearing even to speak out too sternly in his moral judgments, lest he should seem not to hate the evil only, but the evil-doers. They were hard times indeed in which his lot was cast, and there was little in the constitution of the State to satisfy his high ideal or to help to raise men to a better life. The world seemed ruled, in Nero's person, not by its highest, but its lowest thought; passion, not reason, took the lead; the senate only met to register their master's whims, and bespatter with fulsome praise his vilest acts. How was the moralist of lofty standard to act with dignity on such a scene, and use the world as not abusing it? His demeanour in the senate-house was watched narrowly by friend and foe, and even in the distant provinces men turned over the official journals to see how long it would be possible for Thrasea to take part in public life and still be true to himself and loyal to the State. His attitude under these trying circumstances was one of studied moderation, equally free from the extremes of flattery or bravado. When the senate-house was

turned into a court of criminal justice, before which political offenders were arraigned, he threw all his influence into the scale of mercy, checking as far as possible the licence of the false informers, and the servile truckling of the judges to what they supposed to be the will of their Imperial master. But he carefully abstained meanwhile from the bitterness of personal attacks or needless parade of independence, while he raised the tone of senatorial self-respect by his quiet dignity of manner, which neither courted danger nor flinched from it. In the interests of humanity he raised his voice among them against the cruel usages of the gladiatorial shows, which encouraged the worst instincts of a ferocious mob. Other voices after his took up the cry, and kindlier sentiments were gradually fostered, to temper the hardness of the pagan world. Another time we find him defending the privileges of the House and the independence of the provincial rulers against the corrupt influence of powerful intriguers in the provinces, who pretended to make or mar the official career of any statesman, and even to determine the course of proceedings in the senate. His own character, indeed, stood high above the whisper of suspicion. When some complained in Nero's hearing of his decision as arbitrator in a trial, the emperor replied with bitterness, "I wish I were as sure of his affection for me as I am of his perfect equity as judge."

But the time came at last when he could no longer hope to check the servility of the official classes, who vied with each other in the demonstrations of

their joy when Poppæa bore a son to Nero, and of their grief when the young child was hurried off by death. Thrasea could not sit calmly by when thanksgiving services, temples, priesthoods, canonizations even, were decreed. He had already left the senate-house in silence when the news of Agrippina's death, sent by the parricide himself, became the signal for public curses on her memory and compliments to the Imperial assassin. But now he withdrew altogether from official life, when it was idle to resist by ineffectual remonstrance, and when silence might be construed into assent.

But his was too marked a figure to escape unnoticed, and the protest of his silent absence was a theme for every tongue. The members of the civil service in the provinces, the military circles in the camp, read over the long list of decrees and votes and acclamations to see what it was in which Thrasea would take no part; malevolent informers whispered into Nero's ears that such a policy of abstention could not be trifled with much longer, that society was being parted into two great camps, and that as Cæsar and Cato were of old the chiefs of rival parties, so the State was now divided between the adherents of Thrasea and of Nero. Yet the emperor still hesitated to push matters to extremes. For a time he soothed his vanity by the public slight which he put on Thrasea when he appeared before him in a deputation from the senate; he gave him time even now to bend before the threatening storm, and to make his peace by some show of submission.

At last the expected letter came, but Thrasea had nothing to retract or to excuse; he simply asked to know what were the charges laid against him, and he would then prove that he was not guilty of disloyalty in word or deed. The emperor would wait no longer now; the bloodhounds were let loose upon him in the senate, and the cringing house was made to sentence him to death, leaving him only the poor privilege of choosing the means and form of execution.

The description which Tacitus has left us of the last hours which he spent on earth is one of the most striking of the great historian's pages. We see him walking in his garden while a company of his true-hearted friends, among the noblest of Rome's worthies, was gathering round him and his doom was still uncertain. At last the fatal message came, as he was talking with the sage Demetrius of the nature of the soul and its relations to its earthly home; he calmly bade his friends withdraw that they might, if possible, escape his fate; Arria, his wife, was eager, like her mother, to share her husband's death, but he begged her to live on to watch over their only daughter: and when he heard that his son-in-law Helvidius was not condemned to die with him he seemed to forget himself entirely in his pleasure at the tidings. The young quæstor who brought the warrant for his death was standing by, and Thrasea said to him with kindly air that he hoped his turn to suffer would not come, but in such evil days it was well to be prepared, and to learn how quietly

a clear conscience could face death. Then as his veins were opened the current of his talk flowed calmly on, while he sprinkled the ground with the blood which was pouring from his veins, and said, "Let that be my libation to Jupiter, the god of freedom."

It was no wonder, surely, if a character like that impressed so deeply the imagination of the age; few, certainly, of the great men of the Stoa harmonized so perfectly the claims of theory and practice, and in very few indeed was there so close a union of the softer and the tenderer graces with all the dignity of perfect manhood.

But the pattern of his patient moderation was not followed by his son-in-law Helvidius Priscus, who escaped from Nero only to suffer under one of the most prudent of emperors, Vespasian. Whether he was provoked to impatience by the death of Thrasea, or was of more irreconcilable temper, he certainly criticised so hotly all the policy of government, and flaunted so needlessly his republican ideals, that at last even Vespasian's forbearance failed him, and he allowed his judgment to be overruled by his powerful adviser, Mucianus, who insisted on the danger of such constant opposition, and prevailed on him at last to sign the death-warrant of Helvidius. It is true that this account must be received with some reserve, for Dion Cassius and Suetonius, from whom it comes, are writers of an Imperialist bias and reflect the prejudices of the ruling classes; they throw the odium of the act indeed on Mucianus, but possibly exaggerate the provocation given by the

contumacious bearing of Helvidius, of whom authors of higher character, like Tacitus and the younger Pliny, speak with reverence and admiration. However that may be, Vespasian soon regretted the irrevocable act, but the opposition between the palace and the school still lingered on, and under the moody Domitian it led to another ban of exile for the philosophers in general, and to the death of Junius Rusticus, whom Thrasea had spoken of as a saint.

But brighter days came in with Trajan and the Antonines. Freedom of thought and speculative studies were not tolerated only, but encouraged; special privileges were granted to the teachers, some of whom were treated with marked honour, and invited to the court; endowments even were created and salaried professors named, to represent the great historic systems of philosophy. At last Stoicism itself mounted on the throne, and in the person of Marcus Antoninus seemed to realize the high ideal of the king-philosopher which Plato had dreamed of centuries before.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SOCIAL STATUS OF THE PROFESSIONAL MORALISTS AT ROME.

We have seen that in the early Empire, through evil report and good report, in persecution or the sunshine of court favour, the influence of philosophy was on the increase, and that of Stoicism most of all. Some course of training in it was considered in good families as an almost necessary part of the education of the young. In the earlier days of the Republic a Roman youth of talent attached himself to one of the great speakers of the day, followed him about from court to court, watching every gesture and studying his phrases, that he might fashion his own style on the familiar model, and learn in later life to emulate his oratorical successes. But under the Imperial system the prizes of eloquence had ceased to dazzle, the schools of declamation grew wearisome to serious minds, and graver spirits turned to some moralist or sage as to a spiritual director who might give them the counsels of perfection. They were told emphatically that they could only hope to rule their life aright if they sought for guidance in such quarters. "As exercise and medicine provide," says Plutarch, "for the body's health and strength, so philosophy

alone can cure the weakness or the sickness of the soul. By her help man learns to distinguish the noble from the base, the just from the unjust, the things worthy of our choice from those which we should shun; she teaches him how he ought to act in all the relations of his social life, warning him to fear the gods, honour his parents, respect old age, obey the laws, submit to governors, be loving to his friends, show self-control with womankind, tenderness with children, moderation with his slaves—above all, not to triumph overmuch in prosperous days, or to be cast down in adversity, not to be overmastered by pleasure, or brutalized by passion."[1]

How they acted on such principles we see from the example of the youthful Persius, who describes for us in touching language the early relations that were formed between himself and the celebrated Cornutus, whom he chose to be his guide and friend.[2]

> When first I laid the purple by, and free,
> Yet trembling at my new-felt liberty,
> Approach'd the hearth, and on the Lares hung
> The bulla, from my willing neck unstrung;
> When gay associates sporting at my side,
> And the white boss display'd with conscious pride,
> Gave me, uncheck'd, the haunts of vice to trace,
> And throw my wandering eyes on every face,
> When life's perplexing maze before me lay,
> And error, heedless of the better way,
> To straggling paths, far from the route of truth,
> Woo'd with blind confidence my timorous youth.

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[1] De Educ. Puer., c. 10. [2] Persius. Gifford, v. 49.

I fled to you, Cornutus, pleased to rest
My hopes and fears on your Socratic breast.
Nor did you, gentle sage, the charge decline;
Then, dext'rous to beguile, your steady line
Reclaim'd, I know not by what winning force,
My morals, warp'd from nature's straighter course;
While reason press'd incumbent on my soul,
That struggled to receive the strong control,
And took like wax, temper'd by plastic skill,
The form your hand imposed, and bears it still.
Can I forget, how many a summer's day,
Spent in your converse, stole unmark'd away?
Or how, while listening with increased delight,
I snatched from feasts the earlier hours of night?
One time (for to your bosom still I grew)—
One time of study and of rest we knew;
One frugal board where, every care resigned,
An hour of blameless mirth relaxed the mind.

And so, too, we read in the next century of Marcus Antoninus, that his studies of philosophy began at a very tender age, when he caught up with eagerness, and pushed even to excess, the lessons of hardihood and self-control. He tried to put his principles to the test of practice, to live simply in the midst of luxury and licence, to content himself with frugal fare, and to take the bare ground for his bed at night. At last, it needed all his mother's gentle influence to curb the enthusiasm of his ascetic humour.[1] He gave the Stoic Rusticus the credit of his conversion to philosophy:—"It was he who made me feel how much I needed to reform and train my character. He warned me from the treacherous paths of

[1] "Age of the Antonines," p. 28.

sophistry, from formal speeches of parade, which aim at nothing higher than applause. Thanks to him I am weaned from rhetoric and poetry, from affected elegance of style, and can write now with simplicity. From him I have learned to concentrate my thoughts on serious study, and not to be surprised into agreeing with all the random utterances of fluent speech."

In the description which Aulus Gellius gives us of his student life at Athens we have a pleasant picture of the close relations that existed between the teachers and the pupils, in the case at least of Taurus, the philosopher,[1] who was not content with formal lectures, but did his best to form the character of his young friends by personal converse, chatting with them at his bedroom door when they walked home with him from lecture, travelling with them sometimes in the country, taking long walks to see them when he heard that they were sick, and wiling away their weariness by pleasant talk, in which the serious mingled with the gay. If he asked his pupils to his table, he did not care to tempt the appetite with costly viands, but the simple fare of pudding or of salad was seasoned with true Attic salt, and his guests were happier and wiser when they left him. He had a way of delicately hinting that a fault might be mended or bad habit dropped, which served its end while it spared his hearer's self-respect. Yet Taurus was no easy-going teacher, with a standard easily attained. He liked to tell his youthful friends the story of Euclides, who

[1] "University Life at Athens," p. 48.

braved death to hear Socrates, his friend and guide, when it was penal for one of Megara to enter Athens; whereas now-a-days, he said, philosophers must often wait till their pupils have recovered from the wine-party of the night before.

We may gather from the same old writer that the professors sometimes presumed a little on the privileges of their office, and pushed their rights of interference somewhat far, even with scholars of maturer years.[1] Favorinus once was discoursing to his class when the message came that the wife of one of his old pupils—a man of noble birth—had been just delivered of a son. "Let us go," he said, "to congratulate the father." And off he started with his train. They were ushered in together, and gave their compliments and made inquiries for the mother's health. That done the professor said, "Of course the lady will suckle her own child." Her mother answered that she was not strong enough, but must have a wet-nurse for the purpose; but Favorinus was not satisfied with the excuse, and then and there delivered a long lecture on the subject, insisting on the natural duty, and on the danger of such artificial habits. His remarks are sensible enough, as they appear in the notes which Aulus Gellius wrote out from memory, and they may serve at least to illustrate the wide range which the moralist of those days gave to his rights or duties of personal supervision.

Often they had no need to obtrude their counsels,

[1] Aul. Gell., xii. 1.

for they were constantly consulted in the graver passages of life by men who knew not how to apply their moral principles, or were in doubt about a case of conscience. Even the frivolous and worldly, who had long turned away from serious thought, knocked at their doors for consolation or advice in the darker passages of life. "Most men," says Dion Chrysostom, "shrink from philosophers as from physicians; as they will not buy drugs till they are sick, so they refuse the counsels of the moralist till they are wretched. A man is well-to-do, suppose, with a good income or a large estate, in sound health himself, his wife and children well, his credit and reputation good. He is too happy to give philosophy a thought. But let him lose his fortune or his health, he will be more ready to listen then; let his wife, or son, or brother die, then he will send for the sage to comfort him, to teach him how to bear so much misfortune."

But his figure is chiefly to be seen in the pictures drawn for us of death-bed scenes, or when friends are gathering round the man on whom a prince has looked with evil eye, and who has to face the thought of coming doom, or to escape life's evils by a voluntary flight. One or more are always named in the descriptions drawn by the master-hand of Tacitus, when a Plautus, or a Thrasea, or a Seneca is making ready for the last long journey. They were not there, indeed, to shrive the penitent and offer absolution, like the priest-confessor of a later age, but to strengthen the tones of manly resignation, and whisper hopes of life beyond the grave. So customary was

the practice, that in the account of the last hours of Petronius we are told especially that the fastidious worldling passed away, as he had lived, with frivolous epigrams upon his dying lips, and would not hear a word about the faith or aspirations of the wise.[1]

Consistently enough, in the satirical romance which he had probably composed, Trimalchio, the vulgar upstart, gives directions to his servants that when his time draws near no ghostly counsels are to vex his peace of mind, and no philosopher be admitted to his death-bed.

The lively interest in moral questions often led, as we have seen, the earnest-minded to have constant resource to spiritual guides, to attach them even to their persons, and to keep them for years together in their homes. The fashion spread more widely than the actual need, till it became a recognised thing that every great mansion must have its professional moralist, to be ready with a word in season when the conversation took a serious tone, and to give an air of proper dignity to the domestic life. But the relation must have often been a trying one. A Cato with his enthusiasm for wisdom might treat Athenodorus as an equal or superior; Augustus was delicate enough to treat Arius as a friend, and confide every thought to his discretion; and so, perhaps, with many a generous nature the union was very close and tender, and even gained in strength as time wore on. But there was a coarseness in the moral fibre of the

[1] Tac. "Annales," xvi. 19.

Roman, a want of refinement in the treatment of dependents, a dulness of intellectual sympathy which must have often made him in such cases a churlish and exacting patron.

The Greeks, who were most at home in speculative questions, were by national character, in that age at least, too complaisant and supple to maintain a dignity or claim the respect which their position often failed to give them. Some, indeed, stood enough upon their merits, as when Apollonius came from Colchis at the invitation of the prince, to teach philosophy to the young Marcus Antoninus, but declined to call upon him when he came to Rome, saying that the pupil should wait upon the master, not the master on the pupil. Antoninus the Elder only laughed at his pretentiousness, and said that it was easier, as it seemed, to come all the way from Colchis than to walk across the street at Rome.

The Satires of Lucian give us quite another picture, in his descriptions of the domestic philosopher in Roman houses; the colours, doubtless, are too coarse, but the very vehemence of the opening pages of his treatise on the subject show us how bitterly the writer, himself a Greek, resented the insults shown to liberal studies by the purse-proud patrons in their treatment of men of education and refinement.[1] "Weigh not only the trouble, but the baseness, dishonour, and servility of such employments. For first, from the time you are enter-

[1] Lucian. Translation of Jasper Mayne, p. 66.

tained, you are to forget your liberty and parent age, and are to resolve when you enter into such relations to leave your descent, freedom, and ancestors at the door—for liberty cannot have admission with you who are received into such low and ungenerous employment. A servant, therefore, however you are troubled at the name, a servant you are necessarily to be, not of one, but many, and are to wait uncovered from morning to night for contemptible wages. Besides, not being bred of a child to service, but coming to the trade late and well-stricken in years, you will hardly please or be much valued by your master. . . Because you have a large beard, and are of a venerable aspect, and wear a decent Greek mantle, and all men know you to be a grammarian, or orator, or philosopher, he thinks it is for his reputation to mingle such a one with those who go before him, to grace and set out his train. And from hence he gains the opinion of a patron of the Greek arts and of a friend to learning, so that you are not hired for excellency of parts, or discourse, but for your beard and gown, and, therefore, are always to be seen in his company, and never to be from him, but are to rise early every morning to present yourself, and appear in your attendance. He sometimes laying his hand upon you prates anything by chance, and makes show to those he meets that in passage through the streets he forgets not the Muses, but employs the small leisure of his walk in honest conferences: whilst you most wretchedly, sometimes going apace,

sometimes softly, sometimes up, sometimes down (for such you know are the passages of the city), sweat, and put yourself out of breath. At length he strikes into a house, to talk with some friend whom he wants to visit, when, for want of a place to sit down, you are fain to read a book to pass away the time. After this, having neither eaten nor drunk that day, discommodiously washed, and at an unseasonable hour, about midnight, perhaps, you go to supper, and are no longer reverenced or regarded by the rest. But if there be a new-comer you are set below him, and thrust into some obscure corner, where you sit as a spectator only of what is brought to table, and like a dog gnaw the bones which descend to you, or, out of hunger, suck some withered salad refused by those who sit above you. . . . . If at any time a pig be cut up, or a venison pasty, you had need have the carver your friend, or you will divide with Prometheus, and nothing but bones will come to your share. . . . . After a long time, at the Feast of Saturn, perchance, or Minerva, if some threadbare cloak or moth-eaten garment be sent you, you must receive it as a great present. . . . Next, your whole pension comes not to above six crowns, which if you demand you are thought impudent and troublesome, and therefore before you can receive it you must insinuate and flatter, and court the steward, which is one step of servitude more; nor is he to be neglected, who is your patron's friend and of his counsels. . . . . Perhaps the carriage of the man is to be borne with;

but then the women affect, too, to have learned men in pay, who shall attend on their sedans, and they think nothing conduceth so much to their other bravery and pomp as to be called learned philosophers and better makers of verses than Sappho. And for the raising of such an opinion they are accompanied by pensionary rhetoricians, grammarians and philosophers, who most ridiculously read to them, either while they are dressing themselves or curling their hair, or at meal-time, for at other times they are not at leisure. Sometimes while the philosopher is in the midst of his discourse, the chambermaid enters and delivers a letter to her lady from her lover, whereupon the sermon must break off till she have written an answer and can return to her lecture. . . I'll tell you a passage which Thesmopolis, the Stoic, told me of himself, very ridiculous but not incredible, or such as may not happen to any other. He lived with a wealthy, delicate, proud lady in the city, who had occasion to take a journey ; where he said, the first contemptible accident he suffered was, being a philosopher, to sit next in the coach to her page, whose name was Chelidonius (or Swallow). Judge you what a sight it was for a severe, grave, ancient man, with a white beard, to be placed next to an effeminate boy, whose eyes were painted and lasciviously rolled in his head, and his neck wantonly bent to one side, who more deserved to be called Vulture, for his naked chin, than Swallow. Innumerable, he said, were the disturbances which he suffered from the page, who all the way sung

and prattled, and if he had not restrained him would have danced in the coach. He told me also of a certain charge laid upon him by the lady, who calling to him, 'Thesmopolis,' quoth she, 'if you love me you must not deny me a favour which I shall ask of you.' He, as it was fit, promised to obey her request. 'Then,' quoth she, 'I pray, because I take you to be an honest, careful, good-natured man, take my little bitch, Myrrhina, into the coach and keep her for me, and see she lacks nothing, for she is very big with puppies, and is even ready to whelp, and my other servants are such knaves that upon the way they have neither care of her, nor, indeed, of me.' Thesmopolis, at her earnest entreaty, received the bitch. Here, then, was a spectacle most ridiculous to see. A little dog peeping under his gown, just below his beard, and barking in a small voice (for such dogs are most in fashion), and licking the crumbs which stuck upon the philosopher's chin. The page, who sat next him, having, not unwittily, at supper played upon others of the company, at last broke a jest upon Thesmopolis. 'All I can say,' quoth he, 'of Thesmopolis is only this, that of a Stoic, he is become a Cynic, for I heard when the little bitch pupped in his gown.' These are the mockeries, or rather the affronts, which they fasten upon those who live with them, rendering them by little and little tame and patient of contempts. . . . . Many who have been cast upon that course of life have made descriptions to me; some while they yet felt the thraldom, deploring the many and great indig-

nities they endured; others as if they had broken prison, recounting with some pleasure what they had suffered, much rejoicing to repeat the mischiefs they had escaped."

An English reader of Lucian's lively satires may recall perhaps to memory a parallel in an age far nearer to our own.

"In the mansions of men of liberal sentiments and cultivated understandings," writes Macaulay, of the end of the seventeenth century, "the chaplain doubtless was treated with urbanity and kindness. But this was not the general feeling of the country gentlemen. The coarse and ignorant squire, who thought that it belonged to his dignity to have grace said every day at his table by an ecclesiastic in full canonicals, found means to reconcile dignity with economy. A young Levite—such was the phrase then in use—might be had for his board, a small garret, and ten pounds a year, and might not only perform his professional functions, might not only be the most patient of butts and of listeners, might not only be always ready in fine weather for bowls, and in rainy weather for shovelboard, but might also save the expense of a gardener or of a groom. Sometimes the reverend man nailed up the apricots, and sometimes he curried the coach-horses. He cast up the farrier's bills. He walked ten miles with a message or a parcel. If he was permitted to dine with the family, he was expected to content himself with the plainest fare. He might fill himself with the corned beef and the carrots; but as soon as the tarts and cheesecakes made their

appearance, he quitted his seat, and stood aloof till he was summoned to return thanks for the repast, from a great part of which he had been excluded. The nature of the matrimonial connections which the clergymen of that age were in the habit of forming is the most certain indication of the place which the order held in the social system. A waiting-maid was generally considered as the most suitable helpmate for a parson. During several generations the relations between priests and handmaidens were a theme for endless jest; nor would it be easy to find, in the comedy of the seventeenth century, a single instance of a clergyman who wins a spouse above the rank of a cook.[1]

But there is evidence enough that many of the professional moralists at Rome enjoyed a reputation far too high to be exposed to so contumelious a treatment as that which Lucian pictures. Such was Musonius Rufus, for example, who moved with perfect dignity in the highest social circles, won the respect of all who heard him lecture, and left affectionate memories in the minds of men of different type, like Epictetus and the younger Pliny. So commanding was his influence over the young nobles of his time, that Nero, whose jealous fears were roused, resolved to silence his persuasive voice. As no charges of disloyalty could be made good against him, after months spent in prison, he was banished to the bare rocks of Gyara, where it was thought he would at least be harmless.

[1] Macaulay, Hist. i. 327.

But his fame brought so many a visitor from Greece, that the tyrant's fears again were stirred, and Musonius was himself hurried off, like a convict sentenced to hard labour, to work at the canal by which Nero had resolved that the Isthmus of Corinth should be pierced. Demetrius found him there among the workmen, and Cynic as he was, could not restrain an exclamation of surprise. Musonius only struck his spade deeper into the ground, and asked him why he should be grieved to see him toiling for the good of Greece, and if it was not a less painful sight than that of a Roman emperor playing like a common piper? Once, indeed, his moral influence and prudence seemed to fail him, overbalanced by excess of zeal. In the civil wars that followed close on Nero's fall, when the legions of Vespasian were knocking at the gates of Rome and the frightened senators sent envoys to the camp to plead for mercy, Musonius joined them on the mission, trusting overmuch to the eloquence of his own winning words. But the rough soldiery was in no mood to listen to the rounded periods of the man of peace. He only met with ridicule and insult, which would have soon passed on to blows if he had not hurried from the camp, where the clash of arms drowned all appeals to reason.

But the voice of Musonius was more persuasive in dealing with a different class. It was one of his favourite theses for discussion that both sexes alike should profit by the lessons of philosophy, and it would seem that many of the women of his time were not slow to take advantage of the invitation. This

naturally leads our thoughts to one of the brightest features of the age, which may rank also among the fairest fruits of Stoicism at Rome. In the hotbed of Imperial license there had been indeed a portentous growth of female shamelessness and lust. Many a bad woman, like Messalina, had flaunted in the people's sight her orgies of extravagance and crime, and with such examples in high places there was danger that vice would cease to pay the homage of hypocrisy to virtue. But now, as by natural reaction, and with the spread of philosophic teaching, there appears suddenly upon the scene another and a higher standard of true womanhood.

The matrons of the early days of the Republic were expected to be grave, decorous figures; they stayed at home and spun their wool, as the old epitaph expresses it, and controlled the household labours of their handmaids, but they could not share their husband's higher thoughts, or enliven his leisure with refinement.

In Cicero's time they were often more accomplished, and took a more brilliant part in public life, but with the freer culture there was also spreading a laxer tone of thought, and graver scandals to the moral sense. But the leaven of Stoicism soon began to work among the social circles of the capital; its principles of self-restraint and order were congenial to the better type of Roman character, and gradually passed from the streets and lecture-rooms to the quiet retirement of home life, where without respect of persons they struck upon the chords of deeper thoughts, and furnished

strength and solace in the darkest hours of absolute rule.

The "Annals" of Tacitus are often sombre and depressing, but there is many a bright and stirring page in which we read of a long line of noble women whose memory does honour to the early Empire. Such were the two heroines of the name of Arria, each wife to a distinguished Pætus, with Fannia the daughter of the younger; such was the domestic circle in which Persius grew up to manhood; such was the young wife of Seneca, and many another taught in familiar intercourse to understand the theory and the practice of the Stoic morals, who vied with their husbands in the hardihood of patient resolution, and tempered their vigorous principles with softer graces.

We have seen already that the relation between the domestic moralists and those who retained their services could not be maintained always at its proper level. The professional teacher had his dangers also and temptations, as had the hearers who resorted to his lectures. The former was tempted to forget the lofty aims of the philosopher, and to sink into the Sophist or the Rhetorician. He might think more, that is, of the form than the matter of his lectures; lay too much stress on the graces of style and the modulations of the voice and elegancies of gesture; try to win the admiration of his audience, not keeping steadily in view the one thing needful, which should be—to instruct and to reform.

The hearers, on their side, often came as to a lecture of parade to criticise the speaker's skill, or wile away

a vacant hour, or to gather a few fine passages for later use, but with little thought to take seriously to heart the lessons which they heard, and turn them to good account in the conduct of their lives. Musonius and others dwelt, as we are told, with emphatic earnestness upon this frivolity of purpose, speaking with authority as preachers of righteousness themselves, and complaining like the great religious orators of every age that the influence of their words was evanescent on the weak and unconverted conscience. Epictetus speaks in his own homely way of the faults which were so common, then as since, with both the teachers and their scholars.[1] "Rufus was used to say, If you have leisure to praise me, I am speaking to no purpose. Accordingly, he used to speak in such a way that every one of us who was sitting there supposed that some one had accused him before Rufus; he so touched on what was doing, he so placed before the eyes every man's faults. The philosopher's school, ye men, is a surgery; you ought not to go out of it with pleasure, but with pain. For you are not in sound health when you enter; one has dislocated his shoulder, another has an abscess, a third a fistula, and a fourth a head-ache. Then do I sit and utter to you little thoughts and exclamations that you may praise me and go away, one with his shoulder in the same condition in which he entered, another with his head still aching, and a third with his fistula or his abscess just as they were? Is it for this, then, that young

[1] Epictetus, iii. 23. Long's translation.

men shall quit home and leave their parents and their friends and kinsmen and property, that they may say to you, 'Wonderful!' when you are uttering your exclamations? Did Socrates do this, or Zenon, or Cleanthes? What then? is there not the hortatory style? Who denies it? as there is the style of refutation, and the didactic style. Who, then, ever reckoned a fourth style with these—the style of display? What is the hortatory style? To be able to show both to one person and to many the struggle in which they are engaged, and that they think more about anything than about what they really wish. For they wish the things that lead to happiness, but they look for them in the wrong place. In order that this may be done, a thousand seats must be placed, and men must be invited to listen, and you must ascend the pulpit in a fine robe or cloak and describe the death of Achilles. Cease, I entreat you by the gods, to spoil good words and good acts as much as you can. Nothing can have more power in exhortation than when the speaker shows to the hearers that he has need of them. But tell me who, when he hears you reading or discoursing, is anxious about himself, or turns to reflect on himself? or when he has gone out, says, 'The philosopher hit me well; I must no longer do these things.' But does he not, even if you have a great reputation, say to some person, 'He spoke finely about Xerxes;' and another says, 'No; but about the battle of Thermopylæ?' Is this listening to a philosopher?"

There were, however, worse abuses than the poor

vanity of the public speaker who forgot awhile the graver interests committed to his charge in the wish to dazzle those who heard him. The dialectic subtlety and the pedantry of logical parade which were sometimes encouraged in the Stoic schools had a dangerous effect upon unbalanced minds, which, on the strength of a few sophistic puzzles and some technicalities of mood and figure, thrust themselves forward in the assurance of half-educated pride. One such Aulus Gellius describes at length as dogmatising most offensively in the cultivated circle which was gathered in the hospitable seat of Herodes Atticus, at Cephissia. The braggart paraded his glib phrases and pretensions of omniscience in language bristling with the terms of logic ; but at last, to the relief of all concerned, he was silenced by their host, who had the Table-talk of Epictetus brought to him, and read an appropriate passage, which distinguished in caustic style the features of the true student and of the false pretender to philosophy.[1]

We have already spoken of the Cynic vagrants who donned the sage's mantle and often in their coarse effrontery dragged high professions through the mud. One such we read of as pushing rudely in among the friends who were on a visit to Herodes, demanding alms of right, and grumbling because he was not recognised as a compeer. "A beard and staff, indeed, I see," was the retort ; "but no philosopher."

Such abuses were apparent on the surface, and

[1] Aulus Gellius, i. 2.

there were, no doubt, false prophets and pretended seekers after wisdom, but their existence testifies to the wide-spread interest in moral studies, and to the unfeigned desire on the part of very many to find a rule of life, and listen to any preacher who seemed to have a message for his fellow-men. Among them there were many, doubtless, like Demonax, whom Lucian, satirist as he was, described in the most enthusiastic terms, as irreproachable in private life, simple in manners, winning in his words, consummate in his knowledge, and while inclining to the Stoic system, yet so full of tenderness and sympathy as to seem to take in the whole of the human race in his affection.

The Athenians, among whom he lived, felt so much veneration for him that when he passed by, even the magistrates rose up to do him honour; and in his later years he made his home each night in any house where he happened to go in, and the inmates gladly welcomed him as though some good genius had honoured them with his presence. When he died he was buried by the State with every honour, and the stone seat where it had been his wont to sit was crowned with flowers, and regarded as a holy place for time to come.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CAREER OF SENECA.

THE life and influence of Seneca fill so large a place in the history of Stoicism at Rome, that we may find it of advantage to dwell upon these topics at some length, for they will serve to bring before us and to illustrate several of the leading questions connected with the spread of philosophy among the higher social circles, and the practical value of the doctrines of the Porch. We shall have before us one who was no professional moralist, but a scholar and a statesman; familiar with the world of fashion, endeavouring not only to shape his life by the Stoic rule, but to help others as a sort of spiritual director, too wide in his intellectual sympathies to be content with the rigid monotony of Zenon's paradoxes, and also it must be owned too weak in moral fibre to escape some compromise of principle and honour; straining after a high ideal which he confesses that he is very far from having reached, and tempering the hard formalism of his school with tones of tenderness and sympathy, and with the language of a religious feeling which rises at times almost to a Christian level, though its real spirit is essentially cold and self-contained, and alien to the graces of the Gospel. No Roman

moralist has been so widely read, none perhaps has been so variously judged, both in ancient and in modern times. Criticism has fastened keenly on all the seeming inconsistencies of theory and practice, and the real merits of the writer's style and thought have been decried because of his shortcomings as a moral agent. Some have been so struck by his religious phrases as to regard him, with the Latin fathers, as almost a Christian in disguise ; while others, like Diderot, with a very different bias, have pointed to the elevation of his moral standard as a proof of the powers of the unassisted reason.

To many English readers Seneca is only known through the brilliant rhetoric of Macaulay, which showed little mercy to his private character, while it ridiculed his efforts as a moral teacher. Some of the criticisms in question may be conveniently quoted here:—"The ancient philosophy disdained to be useful, and was content to be stationary. It dealt in theories of moral perfection, which were so sublime that they never could be more than theories ; in attempts to solve insoluble enigmas ; in exhortations to the attainment of unattainable frames of mind. It could not condescend to the humble office of ministering to the comfort of human beings. . . . 'In my own time,' says Seneca, 'there have been inventions of this sort, transparent windows, tubes for diffusing warmth equally through all parts of a building, shorthand which has been carried to such a perfection that a writer can keep pace with the most rapid speaker. But the inventing of such things is

drudgery for the lowest slaves, philosophy lies deeper. It is not her office to teach men how to use their hands. The object of her lessons is to form the soul. . . . We shall next be told,' exclaims Seneca, 'that the first shoemaker was a philosopher.' For our own part if we are forced to make our choice between the first shoemaker and the author of the three books on Anger, we pronounce for the shoemaker. It may be worse to be angry than to be wet. But shoes have kept millions from being wet, and we doubt whether Seneca ever kept anybody from being angry. . . . It is very reluctantly that Seneca can be brought to confess that any philosopher had ever paid the smallest attention to anything that could possibly promote what vulgar people would consider as the well-being of mankind. . . . He is forced to own that such a thing might happen, and it may also happen, he tells us, that a philosopher may be swift of foot. But it is not in his character of philosopher that he either wins a race or invents a machine. No, to be sure. The business of a philosopher was to declaim in praise of poverty with two millions sterling out at usury; to meditate epigrammatic conceits about the evils of luxury, in gardens which moved the envy of sovereigns; to rant about liberty, while fawning on the insolent and pampered freedmen of a tyrant; to celebrate the divine beauty of virtue with the same pen which had just before written a defence of the murder of a mother by a son."[1]

The closing lines do little more than reproduce

[1] Macaulay, "Essay on Bacon."

the invectives of a rancorous opponent, as uttered in the crisis of a personal struggle. But Tacitus, whose dramatic pen records them,[1] speaks himself of Seneca in terms of marked respect, and his authority outweighs that of the later writers, such as Dion Cassius, who have stained their pages with the foulest scandals. To estimate the justice of such charges we require to have before us some general sketch of his career.

Seneca came of a Spanish family of ample means, but was brought in early years from Cordova to Rome. His father, a noted rhetorician in his day, had his son trained in his favourite studies, and gave perhaps a bias to the style, which offended the taste of latter purists like Quintilian. But before long his mind was deeply stirred by the grave questions of philosophy which he heard discussed by lecturers of various schools, and he threw himself with youthful ardour into austerities of ascetic practice which were illsuited to his feeble constitution, till it needed all his father's influence to make him relax the rigour of his vegetarian rule. The names and tenets of his early teachers constantly recur, even in his latest writings, and though among them the prevailing tone was Stoic, yet other systems found exponents, to give more width and freedom to his thought. A few passages from his works may serve not only to explain the nature of his education, but also to throw light on the state of philosophic studies in the Roman circles of the day.

[1] Tacitus, "Annales," xiii. 42.

It was the school of Sextius which was then especially in vogue, and the noble Roman from whom it took its name seems to have aimed at giving a scientific basis, combined with a slight Eastern tinge of mysticism, to the austerer qualities of the old national character. "A work of Q. Sextius the father was read to us," says Seneca, "a great man, believe me, and a Stoic, though he would not own it. What vigour and spirit there were in him, and that is more than you will always find in the philosophers. . . . After reading him you will say, 'There is life, and fire, and freedom in him, he seems to rise above the human level, and leaves me full of high self-confidence. Whatever mood I may be in when I take up his writings, I own that I long to brave all hazards, I am ready to cry out, 'Why dost thou loiter, fortune, try your strength upon me, you will find me quite prepared.' I long for hardships to encounter, to test my powers of endurance. For Sextius has this striking merit also, that while he makes you feel how great the prize of a happy life must be, he does not cause you to despair of gaining it, you will be assured that it is high above you, but still within your reach if you will have it."[1]

But Seneca refers more often to the younger Sextius who extended his father's influence, and laid stress on two of the Pythagorean tenets, that of frequent self-examination, and of vegetarian diet. The latter point was especially insisted on by Sotion of Alexandria, who took a high place among the teachers of

[1] "Epist." 64.

this school, and Seneca speaks thus from personal memory of his lectures. "Sotion used to explain to us the reasons which led Pythagoras to abstain from animal food, and why Sextius did the same in later times. Their motives were different, but did them equal credit. The latter thought that man could find food enough without resorting to the blood of life, and that he learnt to practise cruelty by making murder minister to his pleasures. We ought, he said moreover, to cut short all that tends to pamper us. He argued that a varied diet is prejudicial to good health, and ill-suited to our constitution. Pythagoras maintained that all living beings were akin, and that their souls passed by free interchange from one form to another. If he is to be trusted, no soul dies altogether, nor is its life suspended for more than a brief moment, while the metamorphosis is taking place. After Sotion had explained these views and pressed them home with further arguments, he said, 'Great men have held these sentiments, therefore suspend your judgment and reserve the right of embracing them yourself. If they are true, the abstinence from animal food is a law of nature; if not, it is at least a measure of economy. . . . I was strongly influenced by such language and began to abstain myself, and after a year's trial I found the practice not only easy, but agreeable. My mental powers seemed to gain in vigour, and to this day I am not sure that they did not. You may wonder why I dropped the practice. My early life fell in the years when Tiberius was

prince, at the time when certain foreign rites were put under a ban, and among the supposed evidences of their superstition was the abstinence from the flesh of certain animals. My father, who had more dislike for philosophy than actual fear of the informers, begged me to be careful, so I returned to my former habits as to diet."[1]

There was also a famous professor of the Stoic school whose lectures Seneca attended, and whose characteristic features he describes. "For my part, as often as I heard Attalus enlarging on the vices and miseries of life, I felt pity for mankind, and looked on him as a superior being raised above the common level of humanity. When he began to praise poverty, and to set himself to prove that everything which went beyond our actual wants was a needless and irksome burden, I left his lecture-room with the wish that I was poor. After he had criticised our self-indulgence, praising chastity, sobriety, and a mind pure from the taint of superfluous as well as illicit pleasures, I desired to curtail all the enjoyments of the table. Some of this influence has clung to me through life; at first, indeed, I threw myself with ardour into all his rules, but the fashion of the world drew me away and I retained only a few of my good habits." Seneca goes on to notice some of the costlier viands and luxurious ways of common life which he had succeeded in renouncing to the end, such, for example, as oysters, unguents, wine, and the use of baths.[2]

To these teachers we may add the name of Papirius

[1] Ep. 108. [2] Ep. 108.

Fabianus, who also denounced with energy the vices of the age, not dealing much with abstract thought, but giving a rhetorical expression to the doctrines of the Porch. Seneca devotes a whole letter to the criticism of his style, but lays no stress on any special tenets on which he may have heard him dwell.[1]

After some time spent in the lecture-rooms of these philosophers, he chose the Bar for his profession, at which he soon made himself a name, pleading so brilliantly on one occasion before the Emperor Caligula, that the mad despot was moved to murderous envy, but listened happily to the suggestion that the young lawyer seemed far gone in a decline, and that it was surely needless to cut short a life which hung already on so frail a thread. From that time Seneca became a marked figure in the world of fashion, but in those days of absolute rule, danger followed closely on the steps of all who rose to high estate.

The Imperial household was not large enough to hold in peace the wife and sister of the dotard Claudius, but the former ere long succeeded in destroying the influence and reputation of her rival, who was driven with tarnished honour from the court, while Seneca was denounced as the partner of Julia's shame, and hurried off to Corsica to spend eight years in exile. The charge came with an ill grace from the profligate Messalina, who only cared to compass the destruction of her rival, and such was the mockery of justice under Claudius that the

[1] Ep. 100.

emperor's sentence on the accused carries little or no presumption of their guilt. At most, perhaps, we may infer that the successful lawyer moved in the highest circles of the capital, and seemed to careless eyes to live more as a worldling than a studious ascetic. The blow was a very heavy one to bear, and may well have overtasked his powers of resignation. He could find, indeed, topics of consolation, such as those he urges in his letter to his mother Helvia, but there is something strained and artificial in the phrases, which lack the ring of genuine conviction; he sadly owns that he is very far from being perfect, and the lessons of the sages had hardly power to cheer him in the hardships and monotony of these long years of forced inaction. His spirit must have been much broken before he penned his letter to Polybius, the confidential minister of Claudius, in which master and servant are alike addressed in terms of extravagant and cringing adulation. Of the former he speaks as if he were a very Solomon upon the seat of justice, or a Titan supporting on his weary shoulders the burden of a subject world; yet a few months later he insults his memory with savage irony in the merciless burlesque where he describes the appearance of the late emperor among the realms of spirits, to which he was pursued with the curses and the scorn both of the living and the dead.[1] Dion Cassius does not fail to notice the mean flattery to which Seneca stooped on this occasion, but he tells us also that the letter had been lost before his

[1] Seneca, Ludus de morte Claudii.

time, and the scholar Lipsius therefore thought it possible, and Diderot held it to be almost certain, that the fragment which bears the title in his works was a later forgery of some malignant critic, who has pushed the language of servility so far as to make it read to us like overt satire. We would gladly wish it were not genuine, but unhappily there can be little doubt that the letter written was unworthy, whether we have the original or not before us.

At length the fall of Messalina brought hopes of freedom to the exile. Her successor, Agrippina, soon had him recalled, wishing, says Tacitus, to do an act of grace to one who stood so high in popular esteem, and whose gratitude might be of service to her in the future. She entrusted even to his care her young son Nero, though with the ominous condition that he was not to learn philosophy, as if its lessons could have no serious value for a future ruler. When Claudius died soon after and Nero stepped upon the vacant throne, Seneca became his chief adviser, or rather shared with Burrus, the commander of the household troops, the main moving force of the new ministry. The first five years of Nero's reign were afterwards regarded as one of the brightest epochs of Imperial rule, and the actual regents may fairly have the credit of the good government which they secured. But Seneca's eye had soon discerned the latent ferocity of Nero's temper, which was not to be charmed away by edifying treatises like those which he addressed to him "On Anger" and "On Clemency," the moral influence of which was sadly marred by the

hints which fell on willing ears about the unlimited powers of the Imperial ruler. The annals of the court became a long tragedy of shame and horror. The estrangement between the mother and the son had soon begun, when Agrippina claimed to rule in Nero's name, for his advisers, fearing with good reason her capricious lusts, had worked upon his jealous fears, and stooped even to introduce a rival influence by encouraging a low amour. Agrippina's fierce resentment found a vent in ominous threats; she would hurry to the camp and bid the soldiers rally round the son of Claudius, whose rightful claims had been ignored, and hurl the thankless Nero from the throne. The threat cost her her life. But first the hapless boy, whose name she had abused, was disposed of by a draught of poison. Then a plot was laid to sink the ship in which she sailed by night across the bay of Naples, and when that failed recourse was had to open force, and assassins were ordered to despatch her.

There is no reason to believe that Seneca connived at such atrocities, the details of which were left to confidants of meaner stamp. But he has left a fatal stain upon his memory by the public sanctions which he seemed to give to the deeds of horror when they had been done. It was not merely that he clung to office and remained at court, when a moralist of sterner stamp would have retired from a scene where virtue could no longer act with dignity and freedom. For this it was possible to urge the plea that he owed a duty to the Roman world to use such influence

as still remained in the interests of right and order, and not leave the government to be a carnival for the excesses of the unprincipled courtiers of a young despot who would take his passions only for his guide. While the mad caprices of Caligula, and the criminal abuse of power by the freedmen and wives of Claudius, were still fresh in men's memories, it might seem a paramount obligation for the statesman to remain still at his post, if he could hope by his authority to avert or to delay such orgies of misrule. We cannot say how far such motives weighed, and they are never expressly urged by Seneca himself. But many a looker-on would have swept away such pleas as hypocritic trifling, and sneeringly contrasted the high professions of austere philosophy with the growing wealth of the great minister whose broad lands and mansions might be, and were, regarded as the price of blood. It was hard enough before to find an answer to such taunts, but it became almost impossible when he had penned the famous message to the Senate from the throne, which did not scruple to imply that the murdered mother had failed in a plot against the emperor's life, and then died by her own hands in despair. It went on further to trample meanly on the memory of the fallen queen, ascribing to her all the worst atrocities of the last reign as well as criminal ambition in the present. This is a blot upon the character of Seneca which no apology can wipe away. Decency required at least a little more respect for the benefactress to whom he owed his freedom and his high estate. His gratitude, indeed,

was rightly bounded by a higher duty to the State, and he had with good reason tried in earlier years to thwart the influence of the proud and imperious woman over the court and Government of Nero. But that danger was already over before the murderous deed was done; to palliate its guilt was an act of criminal weakness, and though the cringing Senate received the message with applause, its writer must have forfeited the respect of honest men like Thrasea Pætus, who could not even stay in the senate-house when it was read.

As might have been expected, compromise could not long secure the influence for which so high a price was paid. Real power drifted steadily away from the advisers who could not honestly encourage, and dared not firmly check, the whims of their Imperial master. There were supple courtiers enough to flatter and applaud when he came forward, lyre in hand, to sing and play before the populace of Rome; there were boon companions to take part in the reckless fooling of his sumptuous banquets; there were darker spirits, like Tigellinus, to whisper malignant words into his suspicious ear, and mark the victims for proscription. But Seneca, who would not stoop so low, began to feel that there was no place at court for one who would not bow or truckle; wealth, and character, and independence were alike dangerous possessions when greedy sycophants had caught a despot's ear. Before long, therefore, he asked Nero's leave to retire once more into private life after thirteen years of public duties, and to return

all the gifts of his Imperial bounty. The flattering answer which was given did not blind him to his danger, and he withdrew thenceforth from the busy world to spend his last days in earnest study and seclusion. Tyranny at first found other victims among the professors of the Stoic creed, who were regarded with mistrust as disaffected to the ruling powers; some, like Rubellius Plautus, were driven from public life in Rome, and struck down while in exile; in others, like Thrasea, abstention was counted as a crime, and it was felt that before long their turn would come. At length an opportunity was found; a wide-spread conspiracy against the emperor's life had been detected, and in the disclosures which fear or torture had extorted the innocent and guilty were confounded; among them Seneca's name appeared upon the list, while his nephew, Lucan, certainly was active in the plot. The evidence, indeed, was very meagre, and in the bearing and answers of the accused there was no sign of guilty fear. But Nero was resolved that he should die, and sent the fatal message to announce his doom.

The account of Seneca's last hours may be given in the words of Tacitus:—"Seneca, quite unmoved, asked for tablets on which to inscribe his will, and on the centurion's refusal, turned to his friends, protesting that as he was forbidden to requite them, he bequeathed to them the only but still the noblest possession yet remaining to him, the pattern of his life, which if they remembered, they would win a name for moral worth and steadfast friendship. At

the same time he called them back from their tears to manly resolution, now with friendly talk, and now with the sterner language of rebuke. 'Where,' he asked again and again, 'are your maxims of philosophy, or the preparation of so many years' study against evils to come? Who knew not Nero's cruelty? After a mother's and a brother's murder, nothing remains but to add the destruction of a guardian and tutor.' Having spoken these and like words, meant, so to say, for all, he embraced his wife; then softening awhile from the stern resolution of the hour, he begged and implored her to spare herself the burden of perpetual sorrow, and in the contemplation of a life virtuously spent, to endure a husband's loss with honourable consolations. She declared, in answer, that she too had decided to die, and claimed for herself the blow of the executioner. Thereupon Seneca, not to thwart her noble ambition, from an affection which would not leave behind him for insult one whom he dearly loved, replied: 'I have shown you ways of smoothing life; you prefer the glory of dying. I will not grudge you such a noble example. Let the fortitude of so courageous an end be alike in both of us, but let there be more in your decease to win fame.' Then by one and the same stroke they sundered with a dagger the arteries of their arms. Seneca, as his aged frame, attenuated by frugal diet, allowed the blood to escape but slowly, severed also the veins of his legs and knees. Worn out by cruel anguish, afraid too that his sufferings might break his wife's spirit, and that as he looked on

her tortures, he might himself sink into irresolution, he persuaded her to retire into another chamber. Even at the last moment his eloquence failed him not; he summoned his secretaries, and dictated much to them which, as it has been published for all readers in his own words, I forbear to paraphrase. . . . As the tedious process of death still lingered on, he begged Statius Annæus to produce a poison with which he had some time before provided himself. It was brought to him, and he drank it in vain, chilled as he was throughout his limbs and his frame closed against the efficacy of the poison. At last he entered a pool of heated water, from which he sprinkled the nearest of his slaves, adding the exclamation, 'I offer this liquid as a libation to Jupiter the deliverer.' He was then carried into a bath, with the steam of which he was suffocated, and he was burnt without any of the usual funeral rites. So he had directed in a codicil of his will, when even in the height of his wealth and power he was thinking of his life's close."[1]

A recent writer speaks of the dislike which Tacitus seems to feel for the character of Seneca. In this passage at least there is nothing to support the questionable statement, nor is there in the rumour to which he refers in the next chapter, that the conspirators had intended that the empire should be handed over not to Piso, for whom they had scant esteem, but to Seneca "as a man singled out for his splendid virtues by all persons of integrity."

[1] "Annals," xv. 63. Translation of Church and Brodribb.

CHAPTER X.

SENECA AS A MORALIST.

It has been said with truth that, as an author, Seneca should be regarded rather as a spiritual director than as a systematic moralist; his writings are not dogmatic treatises, but moral sermons. But the same remark applies, in a great measure, to many of the philosophers of the later Roman world. The earlier Hellenic seekers after wisdom, while speculative interests were strong, indulged their subtlety of wit and spent much of their strength in abstract questions, which had often a merely controversial value. The greatest of them kept to the serene heights of general theory, seldom coming down into the hot press and conflict of real life, to deal with the details of human action.

But in the first and second centuries of our era, philosophy became for the most part religious in its tone, and earnestly practical in its appeals to intellect and heart. It aspired not only to furnish struggling men with an authoritative standard, but to guide and help and strengthen them in their efforts to attain it. To explain this change, it would not be enough to point to the practical temper of the Roman as compared with that of the more speculative Greek.

In a corner of the old Greek world, at Chæroneia, Plutarch held for years his conferences on moral themes, inviting those of the audience who pleased to stay after his lectures, to lay bare the troubles of their conscience, or enter freely into the story of their personal doubts. Dion Chrysostom travelled widely as a sort of missionary of a moral propaganda, with no original system to propose, but with an earnest sympathy for human trials, which made him popular alike in the palace and the street. Aristides left behind him a whole volume of sermons, and Julian impressed upon the priests of heathendom the novel duty of preaching to their co-religionists as did the ministers of Christ. The tendency in question was part, therefore, of a general movement due to the spirit of the age, influenced no doubt in course of time by the enthusiasm of the Christian teaching, but answering also to a universal want which the old religious and state systems failed to satisfy, now that the spirit of criticism was widely spread, and the incoherencies of prejudice and custom were exposed.

There had been already much discussion among the later Stoics as to the respective value of abstract principles and special precepts. Some, as Ariston, with the dogmatism of the earlier school, had held that the one thing needful was to sweep away the mists of prejudice and error, and to implant the right convictions in the mind, which can then be left to its own native strength and force of will, and cannot possibly be furnished with directions to meet

all the infinite variety of circumstance and action. Others, like Posidonius, laid so much stress upon the practical details, insisting at such length on the theory of habits and description of the virtues, which they called by the pretentious names of ethology, characteristics, or moral imagery, as to leave the impression on some readers that this side alone was of real value, and that principles must be wholly barren without precepts. Seneca discusses the whole subject at some length in two important letters (94, 95), deciding sensibly enough that there must be a framework of general theory to give a scientific value to the special rules, which should depend upon it as the leaves and branches draw their sustenance and vital power from the trunk of which they are the members. But he is very urgent, on the other hand, as to the usefulness of practical direction. The mass of men, he says, are weak, irresolute, passionate, and forgetful, soon blinded by sophistry, or led astray by bad example. The world in which they live is full of specious falsehoods and misleading maxims. They need, therefore, the help, the sympathy, the guidance of a living rule, a voice that can speak with some authority to heart or conscience, proverbial maxims which embody general truth in striking forms, illustrations to encourage or rebuke, friendly counsel which may help the wavering forward in the path of progress. We are far already from the crude paradox of the earlier school, which, beyond the circle of a few blest spirits, saw in the wide world only knaves and fools, all of whose vices seemed of equal black-

ness. For Seneca had a large hopefulness in moral progress; they who felt that they were not already perfect need not despair, but should push forward to the light, clearing as they could the road for those who followed after, and leaving here and there a sign-post for the unwary feet that else might stray.

The volume of his letters to Lucilius, written probably in his last years, brings this side of his character and thought before us in every variety of light. He knows, we see, no royal road nor original system of salvation, and therefore is not tempted to lay too much stress on intellectual beliefs. But he is so keenly sensible himself of the fleeting and unsubstantial nature of the interests of common life, that he tries to wean his friend Lucilius from the vanities and ambition of the world, that he may attune his thoughts to higher things, and find the true happiness of spiritual peace. He never seems to weary of the importunity of his appeals, and letter follows letter on some fresh aspect of the rule of life. Nor is his interest bounded to the welfare of a single soul, for he tells of his anxiety to bring others within the circle of his influence, and how he uses different methods to suit the varieties of character and age, bearing even patiently the waywardness of youth and petulant rebuffs, in hope to find one day a favourable moment when he may gain an access to the softened heart. Lucilius, in his turn, must do his part to spread the moral propaganda, not failing to let drop a timely hint, and win other souls if possible to listen to the words of spiritual counsel. There is little

assumption of authority as of a sage condescending to poor worldlings on a lower level; rather he points to the experience of his own efforts to go forward, recommending the self-discipline to which he has himself recourse, the quiet times of meditation in retreat, when the spirit communes with the world unseen; the hard mattress and the scanty fare, with which he tries to keep the body under, and rise above the need of riches which may one day take wing and fly away; the nightly musings when the story of the day rises before the wakeful conscience, which gives sentence on the rash word and hasty act;—such are the methods of his self-improvement, the regimen which he prescribes for serious minds. He carries perhaps sometimes too far the frank admission of his own shortcomings; as when he tells of a pleasant time which he spent in the country with a friend, when they bivouacked as they could, and shared the humblest fare, while a village bumpkin drove their rustic carriage. But while he enjoys the retrospect of all these simple pleasures, he admits that he could not bear to be taken for the owner of the sorry vehicle in which they rode, and could not meet without a blush the grander carriages of people of distinction. He takes himself to task for having made so little progress, and caring over much for the opinion of the world, and setting a foolish value on superfluous wealth.[1]

At times he carries his confessions somewhat far,

[1] Ep. 87.

as when he tells his friend Lucilius that he has taken rooms above a public bath, that he might learn to concentrate his thoughts, and disregard distractions of all kinds. He dwells complacently on the curious medley of the local noises which were forced upon his ears—the hissing and the groaning, the leaping and the splashing, the singing and the whistling, the hue and cry after the pickpocket, and many a disturbance of the kind—as long a list as Londoners could make of the costermongers' cries, and organ-grinders and brass bands, or rumbling carriages that allow no rest to mind or body. We read at the close of the epistle that the experiment has been successful, and the writer thinks that he may leave the unpleasant scene, and betake himself to more attractive quarters.[1]

It has been said above, that Seneca lays little stress on rigid adherence to an abstract system. It is curious to notice that the quotations which occur in the earlier letters to Lucilius are rarely drawn from Stoic authors, but most frequently from Epicurus, who had given his name to the theory most markedly contrasted with the doctrines of the Porch. Pleasure is the standard of the one, while the other speaks of right and duty. This seems to encourage a worldly prudence, which would shun all high ambition, and chiefly aim at keeping on good terms with self, and with mankind at large. That would nerve the will for conflict, and live laborious days, and shun all self-

[1] Ep. 58.

indulgence as a traitor offering a kiss. There was a cardinal opposition in the leading principles of the two systems; there was a momentous difference between the two types of conduct to be traced in the rank and file in either camp. The noblest spirits of the age were Stoics, but very few of resolute temper and high aims professed the creed of Epicurus. Yet there is less difference than might have been expected when we pass from abstract theory to rules of conduct. For beyond the dialectics of the schools, and the high-sounding dogmas which divided ancient sages, there was a philosophy of common sense, whose store of moral maxims, and list of virtues and of vices, gradually became the common stock of all the rival sects. Pleasure itself, as Epicurus painted it, became so refined and spiritualized a thing, that the happiness which it secured was an ideal of calm serenity and chastened moderation, unruffled by the gusts of vicious passions, and scarcely to be distinguished from the tranquil impassiveness of the Stoic sage. In practice, as in theory, the master lived a blameless life upon this higher level, which many of his followers found a very slippery incline; while his delicate sensibilities of taste and temper took the place of any sterner discipline of self-denial. The fine sentiments and wise suggestions of his works are largely used by Seneca, the more perhaps because Lucilius had been before attracted to the sect of Epicurus; but, indeed, it was his constant practice to pass freely from one school to another, and to take the thoughts which suited him wherever he might

find them. Thus, he sometimes seems almost a Pythagorean, when he recalls the Sotion whose lectures he attended as a boy; he talks like Plato on the nature of the soul and immortality; and speaks of "our" Demetrius as if he were a Cynic like his friend. No wonder if Quintilian and other critics have remarked upon his inconsistencies and want of rigorous method, forgetting that his aims were practical, and that he cared more to direct a conscience than to expound a system. Many of the letters too were written with a special object; the advice would vary with the circumstances, and no rigidly consistent rule could be applied to different types of character and age.

But there can be no doubt that Seneca adhered without hesitation to the Stoic creed, and his reserves and compromises belong more to his heart than to his head. We still hear more than we could wish of the extreme positions of the school, though, as a man of the world and a warm-hearted friend, he had often to abate the rigour of its claims. We hear too much of the ideal man, whose absolute serenity is not to be clouded by any of the accidents of health or fortune, who cannot be touched by wrong or insult, never feels anger, grief, or pity, or any of the impulses of our emotional nature. He refuses to allow that this is an imaginary picture, though only to be realized perhaps by few, and at long intervals of time. And yet, at another time, he frankly owns that all this grand theory leaves him unconvinced. To be faithful to the tenets of his school he controverts the view of

Aristotle that the emotions are necessary parts of human nature, to be regulated, not repressed. But his own reasoning on the subject is inconsequent and feeble, and betrays his sense of the weakness of a thesis which he elsewhere surrenders in detail. He seems to feel, indeed, throughout misgivings which he puts into the mouth of an objector, and never really meets.

"These are the reasons why your teaching carries so little weight; you promise much more than we can hope for, still less credit. Then, after your grand professions that the sage is never poor, you admit that he may be in want of clothing, food, and shelter. You say that the sage never can be foolish, yet allow that he may lose his senses, and utter silly words, and go to whatever lengths his morbid violence may force him. After denying that the wise man can ever lose his freedom, you admit that he may be sold, and have to obey orders, and to do menial drudgery to serve his master. So, after all your lofty airs, you go to much the same lengths as other folks, though you call things by new names. So I suspect that it is something of the kind in this case: fine and grand as the statement sounds at first that the wise man cannot receive a wrong or insult. For it makes all the difference whether you assert that he is beyond the influence of resentment or of wrong. If you mean that he will bear it patiently, he enjoys no special privilege, only the common grace of patience, which we may learn by having much to bear. If you mean that he never will be wronged, that is, that no man

will ever try to injure him, then I will give up all else and be at once a Stoic."[1]

He cites with approval the example of the resolute Demetrius, who complained that the powers of heaven had not deigned to tell him of their purpose, that he might have forestalled their purpose by offering freely what it was their pleasure to remove, since all that he had was theirs to give, and theirs to take away.[2] He speaks with admiration more than once of the constancy of Stilbon, who seemed to lose his all, fortune, family, and home, when his city was destroyed, yet could say calmly that he had all his property safe in his own keeping, meaning thereby the qualities of mind and temper, of which no enemy could rob him.[3] He expends much idle subtlety on the self-sufficiency of virtue, the happiness of which is not to be impaired by any loss of friends or children ; it is but their bodies, not themselves, he says, we lose ; good cannot perish save by passing into evil; say they are gone, yet their place is more than filled by the good qualities which lived but lately in them ; for what matters it, if the waters flow away, if the fountain still runs on.[4] Still he owns that it is natural that all the outward tokens of emotion should appear in the wise man, the shifting colour, and the tottering limbs, and the sudden chill of sorrow, for these are due to natural impulse where the mind has no control, but its resolution will be shown in the assurance that there is

[1] Dial. ii. 3.
[2] Ibid. i. 5.
[3] Ibid. ii. 5.
[4] Ep. 74.

no evil which can make his reason lose its healthy balance.[1]

Elsewhere, he says that he has no wish to raise the sage above the common level of humanity, or treat him as a rock insensible to mortal pain, for he is made up of two elements—the one irrational, which is full of changing sensibilities; while the rational preserves the balance of its calm and fixed convictions. "For fear our theory should seem to travel beyond the bounds of nature, I admit that the wise man will experience fear and pain and pallor, for all these are bodily sensations, but the real evil or misfortune only begins then when these enslave the mind, and make it own its degradation or its shame."[2]

It is evident that most of the paradox of the Stoic apathy is abandoned in these lines, and that it becomes for the most part a mere question of names if the emotions are disapproved of only when they pass beyond control, and the term "evil" is restricted to a moral sense as distinct from physical discomfort.

He is far, again, from expecting rigid self-restraint from his mourning friends, or from denouncing the choking sense of grief. "It would be inhuman," he says, "not virtuous, to look on as calmly when our kinsmen are borne out to burial as when we saw them living at our side. . . . Let the tears flow as long as the emotion bids them." Nor does he tolerate them only when the grief is violent and loss is recent. "There are tears to which we give free course, when

[1] Ep. 74. [2] Ibid. 71.

we recall to memory the friends whom we have lost, when we think over their pleasant talk, their cheerful intercourse, and tender offices of friendship. 'Let the tears flow then as they will."[1]

The sage himself is no impassive thing, but will show humanity in sorrow, though without loss of self-control; yet, for himself, he owns that his grief for his friend Serenus passed all proper bounds, so completely was he over-mastered by his sorrow.[2] He has the good sense to see that he who would rebuke grief must rebuke love as well, and his own heart was warm and tender, and he does not think it unphilosophical to own it. He is careful of his health, he says on one occasion, more for the sake of his loving wife, Paulina, than for himself. He sees how much her happiness, her life even, is bound up with his own, and regards it as a duty to indulge so far our natural affections.[3] He protests against the sordid view of friendship, which would make the strength of the tie depend upon the sense of profit from a friend's company or help, as though with Epicurus we desired to find a friend only to sit by our bed-side when we are ill, or to come to our succour when in poverty or prison. Rather, it is the expression of a natural instinct, and not a calculation of self-interest. The best philtre or love-charm to provoke affection is to feel love oneself. The pleasure consists in forming the friendship, not in after profit. "Why should I make a friend? To have some one

[1] Ep. 99. [2] Ibid. 63. [3] Ibid. 104.

to die for; to follow into banishment; to risk my own life to save him."[1] No good thing can be enjoyed without a friend to share it.[2]

It is partly for this reason that he discourages all austerities of dress and manner, all Cynical disregard of common customs, as tending to isolate us from our fellows, and to emphasize the points of difference that divide us, in place of fostering the kindly sympathies, the courtesy, and the gregarious instinct on which his philosophy, as interpreted by his own tenderness, lays so much stress.[3]

This kindliness, he thinks, should be strong enough to overleap the social barriers which divide us, and ignore even the difference between the freeman and the slave. No ancient moralist has spoken so feelingly and earnestly upon this subject, or described with more contempt the haughty inhumanity of many a wealthy master, surrounded by a multitude of cowering menials, in whom he saw, according to the Roman proverb, "as many enemies as slaves." "Not so," says Seneca, "it is our own fault if we make them such; they are of the same flesh and blood as we are, breathe the same air of heaven, are, or should be, our fellows, companions, and our humble friends. We need not go abroad in quest of friendship; we shall find it, if we seek it, in our homes. Kindly intercourse will bring to light their good qualities of mind or temper, and will gradually efface the grosser stains of their training or associations."[4]

[1] Ep. 9. [2] Ibid. 6. [3] Ibid. 5. [4] Ibid. 47.

He raised his voice also in protest against the butchery of the gladiatorial shows, and the ferocity with which criminals were exposed to the wild beasts while the populace looked on at the cruel sport. He warns his friend Lucilius against the demoralizing influence of such a scene, reacting as it must upon the character and temper. "They are highwaymen and murderers, you say, and deserve to die. True, they meet perhaps with their deserts; but what have you done that you should be condemned to sit by at such a sight?"[1]

We see, therefore, that in spite of all his borrowed phrases of the school, there is little in Seneca's own teaching of the hardness and the coldness of the Stoic creed. In place of an unattainable ideal, which was untrue to the conditions of our human nature, we have a discipline of self-improvement, with constant hopes of further progress, and criteria of the various stages of perfectibility.[2] "Let us press on and persevere; more remains for us to do than we have done already; but the wish to improve is a great step towards improvement. To this my conscience bears me witness. I do wish it with all my mind."[3] The sage's calm is no unfeeling self-contentment, but is coloured and warmed with social sympathies and tender moods, in which sorrow and love and pity find a place. The seeming impassiveness (ἀπάθεια) consists only in the mental balance by which the reason can measure things at their true value, and refuse to be overpowered by emotion. But philosophy alone

[1] Ep. 7. [2] Ibid. 75. [3] Ibid. 71.

can teach us the true estimate of all that can befall us here; of the wealth and honours, business and pleasure, of our mortal lot; and therefore Seneca betakes himself with ardour, and would guide others also, to the Mistress whose service alone is perfect freedom.[1]

But there was nothing in this intellectual freedom, he insisted, which should give umbrage to the ruling powers. They were quite mistaken who supposed that the devoted students of philosophy must be turbulent or stiff-necked in their self-assertion, and disrespectful towards magistrates or princes. Far from that, the more they prized the blessings of their studious ease, the more grateful they should be towards the rulers whose vigilance secured their rest from danger or disturbance. There could be no fear of rival jealousies from those who should be raised above the ambition of the world, and for whom the game of politics and war had less attraction than the care of their own souls. As their happiness was more complete than that of other men, so they should have more cause to thank the rulers to whom they owed their peace.[2] It is the jealousy of Nero to which this passage points, and it is one of the few places in the Letters where we have any direct reference to the political aspects of the times. And yet, if we look more deeply, we shall find that to a great extent they coloured his temper and gave a bias to

[1] Philosophiæ servias oportet, ut tibi contingat vera libertas (Ep. 8).

[2] Ep. 73.

his thought. They explain the gloomy tinge which his meditations often take from the abiding thought of death, which is always present to his fancy. It was, indeed, a commonplace of the ancient moralists to insist upon this subject, as the one theme on which we could never speculate in vain. As he says himself, "for other things our preparations may be useless. The soul may be steeled against poverty, and riches abide with us to the end. We may have armed ourselves against assault of pain, and yet never have our patience tested, thanks to the good hap of a sound and healthy body; we may have schooled ourselves to bear with fortitude the loss of our departed friends, while fortune wills that all whom we love outlive us; this is the one discipline whose use will certainly one day be tested."[1]

Even in early years the mind of Seneca may have often dwelt upon the thought of death, for he was always of weak health, and almost every variety of ailment had left its mark upon him.[2] His bodily infirmities form a frequent subject of reference in his letters, though there is nothing querulous or unmanly in his tone. They lead him to dwell however on the question, whether it may not seem advisable one day to make an easier exit from the world than that which nature might provide, and he decides that he will not be impatient to depart in peace so long as disease leaves his nobler faculties untouched; should it begin to lay rude hands upon

[1] Ep. 70. [2] Ibid. 54.

his reason or disturb his moral life, while it spares the vital spark, then he will speed away at once "as from a ruinous and crumbling house."[1]

But in later years more probably it was the experience of a despot's cruel caprices which made the visions of death familiar to his fancy, and suicide in all its bearings an engrossing question. "Some professors of philosophy maintain," he says, "that we have no right to lay violent hands upon ourselves, but that duty calls us to await the end which nature may assign us. In saying this they do not see that they bar the road to freedom." But we may rejoin perhaps that in this comment Seneca is false to his own principles, forgetting his own analysis of freedom as the state in which the reason holds the sway over the passions, and has might as she has already right. He concludes that no general decision can be made upon a question which depends so much on its details, but he has no doubt at any rate that he may choose his own form of an inevitable death, as we may select a ship in which to make a voyage, or a house in which to dwell. "A longer life is not always the better, but a lingering death is always worse."[2] Not only, as he thinks, have the heroes of humanity like Cato asserted this right of theirs to die when and how they pleased, but men of low degree, the poor gladiators of the stage, the barbarians or criminals condemned to be thrown to the wild beasts, have flung defiance in the face of death, and left ex-

[1] Ep. 58. [2] Ibid. 70.

amples which the subjects of tyranny may take to heart.

It has been remarked that of the modern critics who have occupied themselves with Seneca, Garat was the first to understand him rightly, and that because he lived under a reign of terror which recalled the memory of the dark days of Nero. He tells us that he had the guillotine in prospect when he began to read afresh the works of Seneca for a new edition. He had read him in his earlier years of cheerful life before the Revolution; he read him once more in days of gloom, and found him quite another writer. The first time he had much work to keep the page still open; the second time he could scarcely tear himself away. "His morals had seemed before unnatural and high pitched; now they appeared hardly up to the level of our own experience and needs." Or again, "Seneca's philosophy was composed for those periods of lingering agony to which tyrants sometimes condemn their people." Again, "There was need of a philosophy to teach men to give up all they had before it was taken from them; to isolate them from their fellows who could do no more for them; to create a personal force and greatness which despots and executioners might crush, but which they could not cause to tremble. Such is the philosophy of Seneca." Or again, "He dwells, it is true, on the same truth a long time, but remember that it is not with him a question only of what he ought to think of death; he has to

make himself ready for the moment when Silvanus will come with Nero's message 'Die.'" [1]

This attitude of Seneca seems to have been neglected by Macaulay in the criticism which was quoted at the beginning of this chapter. It is not fair to treat his thought as idle moralizing upon abstract questions, such as the man of action may brush impatiently aside, for it was really earnest meditation on the experience of actual life. It is possible indeed that the lofty sentiments on anger and on clemency may have been wasted on a Nero, and phrases about the vanity of wealth may have sounded as mere empty talk in the ears of many a Roman noble, but so perhaps the grandest eloquence of Christian divines, even the preaching of Prophets and Apostles, may have seemed to fail entirely to touch the conscience of some hearers, yet it might be thought mere shallow flippancy to treat such teaching as unpractical because it did not deal with the methods of induction or contribute to the material comforts of the age. Meditations such as Seneca's, inadequate as they may seem, took the place of religious principles among the educated circles of the Roman Empire, were a protest of real value against the coarse materialism of the old heathen world, taught the choicer spirits how to live with dignity and die with honour, supplied a force of public sentiment of which even despots had to take account, and did something to lessen the misery of the toiling masses

[1] E. Havet, "Le Christianisme et ses Origines," ii. 256.

by tender words of sympathy for the stranger and the slave. It is a matter of regret, no doubt, that the old philosophy of Greece and Rome busied itself so little with the inductive method and the order of the physical world, helped so little to advance man's mastery over nature by the knowledge of its laws. This is no more true of Seneca, however, than of all the schools of Hellenic thought. But the moral value of their speculations is not lessened by the fact that they neglected the fields of physical research, and it is unworthy of a serious critic thus to confuse the wants of different ages, and to treat with contempt the ancient seekers after wisdom, who pondered on the questions that were full of actual interest to them and theirs. In the letter which has been referred to (p. 129) Seneca distinguished, as he was warranted in doing, the functions of the moralist and the mechanician, and it is idle to compare the usefulness of each, or to balance the increase of man's creature comforts against the improvement of his moral nature. If Seneca seems to underrate the value of the artist's or inventor's work, we must remember the ascetic bias of his teaching, intended as it was to counteract in himself or others the sensualism and the mammon worship of the age. His tones may seem to us high pitched, his language too intense and highly coloured, but this is one of the literary features of the times themselves, when vice and luxury and despotic force were all realized in monstrous shapes, and challenged therefore and excused some seeming extravagance of rhetoric and style.

We have not yet done, however, with Macaulay. There is an amusing passage in which he imagines a Stoic and a follower of Bacon as fellow-travellers upon a journey. "They come to a village where the small-pox has begun to rage, and find houses shut up, intercourse suspended, the sick abandoned, mothers weeping in terror over their children. The Stoic assures the dismayed population that there is nothing bad in the small-pox, and that to a wise man disease, deformity, death, the loss of friends are not evils. The Baconian takes out a lancet and begins to vaccinate. They find a body of miners in great dismay. An explosion of noisome vapours has just killed many of those who were at work; and the survivors are afraid to venture into the cavern. The Stoic assures them that such an accident is nothing but a mere *ἀποπροηγμένον*. The Baconian, who has no such fine word at his command, contents himself with devising a safety-lamp. They find a shipwrecked merchant wringing his hands on the shore. His vessel with an inestimable cargo has just gone down, and he is reduced in a moment from opulence to beggary. The Stoic exhorts him not to seek happiness in things which lie without himself, and repeats the whole chapter of Epictetus *πρὸς τοὺς τὴν ἀπορίαν δεδοικότας*. The Baconian constructs a diving-bell, goes down in it, and returns with the most precious effects from the wreck. It would be easy to multiply illustrations of the difference between the philosophy of thorns and the philosophy of fruit, the philosophy of words and the philosophy of works."

It has been remarked with justice that in this passage the author "only represents the conflict of man with nature, and it is true that in confronting nature only two alternatives are possible, action or silence; protest is not to be thought of. This is not so true when we have to face human injustice; there defiance is meritorious. What could the Baconian of Macaulay have done had he been in the place of Seneca? What was the operation possible to cure the world of Nero? It may be said, that it was the insurrection of Vindex; and that is true, but Vindex did not and could not act at once. It was needful first that the world should be weary of the master it had borne with so long. Physical evils are felt and recognised directly, it is not so with that moral poison of which nations die; they must first be made to feel that they are ill, and that is the first step towards the cure. That is just what Seneca did, and his so-called declamations certainly contributed to cause that universal impatience which brought about deliverance."[1]

The opulence of Seneca, contrasted with his praises of contented poverty, has often moved the spleen of critics, as among others of Macaulay. Was it, besides, ill-gotten wealth, the rhetorical phrases then become still more hollow and insincere. But as to its source we have no certain evidence. He came of a family of ample means; his talents as an advocate brought him large professional gains; but above all the favour

[1] E. Havet, "Le Christianisme et ses Origines," ii. 254.

of the court heaped its bounties lavishly upon him. It was natural enough to sneer and say that he clung to office for the sake of wealth and honour, but though his position was a false one he may well have been unwilling on far higher grounds to let his influence pass into worse hands. If he penned the message of Nero to the senate with its attack on the memory of the murdered Agrippina, nothing can justify his conduct. It exposed him to the vilest imputations, which were not probably well-founded, but which could not be disproved. But after that he gains in dignity and moral courage. He stoops to no flattery of Nero's vices; he is taunted even with uncourtly frankness. He offers to resign all the solid fruits of the Imperial favour, and withdraws from the world of fashion when the offer is declined. This is the period in which the letters that we read were written, and their language is almost certainly sincere. He feels his wealth a dangerous burden, for the lightning strikes the loftiest spires. It makes him a mark for jealous gossip, which he cannot always leave unnoticed. Thus on one occasion he observes "our object should be to live by nature's rule, but it is unnatural to distress the body, to disfigure it by the neglect of simple graces or by recourse to unwholesome or repulsive fare. Philosophy requires not penal discipline, but moderation. He shows his greatness who can use earthenware like silver, nor is he inferior who can treat his silver plate as if it were but earthenware. It shows an abject soul not to be able to use wealth aright."

CHAPTER XI.

SENECA AND ST. PAUL, OR THE RELATION OF STOICISM TO CHRISTIANITY.

THERE are some letters which professedly belong to a correspondence between St. Paul and Seneca, in which the latter writes like one who is a Christian at heart, and seems to be acquainted with the style and doctrines of the former. They are, indeed, a clumsy forgery, for their literary form and thought, and the references which they contain, are such as could not possibly proceed from either writer. But they point to a prevalent belief among the Fathers of the Latin Church that Seneca had felt the influence of St. Paul, and they grew probably out of the attempt to clothe in circumstantial shape the wide-spread fancy.

Men could not but be struck with the echoes of Christian thought and feeling, which occur more frequently in Seneca than in any heathen writer. They remembered that St. Paul lived in the same part of the century, and was brought before Gallio, the statesman's brother, who was then provincial governor at Corinth; that he was lodged at Rome in the custody of Burrus, the general of the prætorian soldiers, who shared so long with Seneca the cares of actual government, and that he stood at last for

judgment before Nero, or his council, and found friends or converts among those of Cæsar's household. It seemed natural to suppose that in one or other of these ways Seneca's attention was called to the apostle, and that his earnest wish for self-improvement was rewarded ere he died by a fuller measure of the truth. There is no direct evidence, indeed, of any contact, except the similarity of thought which grows more marked in Seneca's later writings, but the belief must have been early spread; and St. Jerome not merely speaks of him as "our own," a term which he might possibly apply to Virgil, or to any other Latin writer, but says that he ranks him in the catalogue of the saints, on the authority of the well-known correspondence with St. Paul.

In the days when Jerome lived, the ascetic spirit had taken strong hold upon the Christian Church; multitudes were turning from the world which they despaired of to the calm retirement of the cloister. In Seneca they found a moralist who seemed to think as meanly as themselves of the common interests of the life of cities; who tried to wean himself and others from the "lust of the flesh," and the "lust of the eyes," and the "pride of life," by stringent rules of self-denial, by the exercise of meditation, and detachment from the busy world. Here was a fund of sympathy far greater for them than for ourselves, and in their surprise and pleasure at such outward features of resemblance in the methods of self-discipline they laid probably too little stress on the

essentials of the moral life, and on the articles of his religious creed.

They found again in Seneca many of the special terms adopted in their own spiritual language, and these in the course of time had become coloured with the associations of theology, and were full of the suggestions of its doctrines. They were naturally tempted to receive them in the sense familiar to themselves; to do otherwise required a serious effort of critical reserve, though the words may have conveyed to earlier readers quite a different shade of meaning. Thus his "*Sacer Spiritus*" sounded to them like the "Holy Spirit" of the Christian Trinity; "*peccatum*" was the sin of which all men are guilty; "*salus*," the salvation which should be their aim; "*caro*" was the body with all its carnal passions, which can only be transfigured (*transfigurari*) by a spiritual grace, one form of which they seemed to find a hint of in his "*sacramentum*"; while his influence on the moral life was traced in "*caritas*," or charity.

Some of the most striking parallels to our religious thought belong, not to Seneca himself or to the system of philosophy which he embraced, but to earlier schools and different thinkers from whom he freely borrowed. We have already called attention to this tendency, which was natural enough in that late age when rigid exclusiveness was out of date and eclecticism had become a ruling fashion. Thus the beautiful expressions to be found in him about our Heavenly Father, from whom come all good and perfect gifts, whom we should try to imitate, that we

may be perfect like our Father; of the guardian angels who watch over us; of the immortality beyond the grave, and the decrees of Divine retribution; of the extension of the guilt of vice from the act to the intention; the picture of the just man calmly confronting persecution and forgiving his worst enemies;—these and many others may be found in Plato centuries before they gained a place, but not always a harmonious setting, in the letters and dialogues of Seneca. In the school of Pythagoras, which he followed in his youth, he may have learnt to examine himself, as was his later practice, to listen to the voice of conscience, and to confess the wrong which he had done. From Epicurus, as we have seen, he borrowed much, and among other sentiments that one, "the consciousness of sin is the first step towards salvation,"[1] on which so much stress has been laid as an evidence of Scriptural doctrine. Of many other of his highest thoughts traces could be found in earlier writings if it were worth while to discuss them in detail.

Yet after all these reserves it must be owned that the parallels between the language of Seneca and Scripture are often very close and striking. The subject is examined fully in a special work by a French writer;[2] but the most carefully selected list is given by Bishop Lightfoot, in an essay in his treatise on the "Epistle to the Philippians," which has left nothing

[1] "Initium salutus est notitia peccati" (Ep. 28).

[2] Aubertin, "Sénèque et St. Paul."

further to be said upon the question. It may be enough, therefore, to transcribe a few of the most marked examples to illustrate the close resemblance of the thought. "The mind, unless it is pure and holy, comprehends not God."[1] "What will the wise man do when he is buffeted? He will do as Cato did when he was smitten on the mouth. He did not burst into a passion, did not avenge himself, did not even forgive it, but denied its having been done."[2] "I will be agreeable to friends, gentle and yielding to enemies."[3] "Give aid even to enemies."[4] "Do not, like those whose desire is not to make progress but to be seen, do anything to attract notice in your demeanour or mode of life. Avoid a rough exterior and unshorn hair, and a carelessly kept beard and professed hatred of money and a bed laid on the ground, and whatever else affects ambitious display by a perverse path . . . Let everything within us be unlike, but let our outward appearance resemble the common people."[5]

"If you imitate the gods, confer benefits even on the unthankful: for the sun rises even on the wicked, and the seas are open to pirates."[6]

"Good does not grow of evil, any more than a fig of an olive tree. The fruits correspond to the seed."[7]

"Let him break his bread with the hungry."[8]

[1] Ep. 87; Matt. v. 8.
[2] De Const. Sap. 14; cf. Matt. v. 39.
[3] De Vita Beat. 20.
[4] De Otio, 28; cf. Matt. v. 44.
[5] Ep. 5; cf. Matt. vi. 16.
[6] De Benef. 4; cf. Luke vi. 35.
[7] Ep. 87; cf. Matt. vii. 17.
[8] Ep. 95; cf. Isaiah lviii. 7.

As regards the form of Seneca's expressions we may notice how often the metaphors of Scripture seem to reappear among his writings, as for example, that of the house built upon the rock ; of life regarded as a warfare and a pilgrimage ; of the athlete's crown of victory ; of hypocrites like whited walls ; of girding the loins of the mind ; of spending and being spent in faithful service.

We may find traces even of some of the best known of the parables of Christ, as of the sower, and the rich fool, and the debtor, and the talents out at usury.

Resemblances so numerous and circumstantial seem to call for some attempt at explanation, such as the supposed acquaintance of the moralist and the apostle. The silence of history makes this very doubtful. Gallio and Burrus, as far as we know their characters, would attach too little significance to the language of St. Paul to speak or write about it to their literary friends; and Seneca may well have failed to hear that some slaves or freemen of the palace were attracted by a new form of devotion preached by a Jewish prisoner from Asia. Yet it is probable enough, as Bishop Lightfoot has observed, that the figures and distinctive maxims of the Scriptures, the imagery adopted by our Lord, because already familiar to his hearers, may have found their way by various channels even into the disdainful circles of philosophy. Seneca speaks, indeed, in scornful tones of the people of the Book ; he had given up in early years his abstinence from animal food lest he should

be thought to share the scruples of some of the despised races of the East; yet the Jews were spread through every land, and quartering themselves in the centre of the Roman world, had called the notice of the curious to their peculiar customs, and won proselytes in every circle. Tacitus might show his contemptuous ignorance of their history in the past, but they clung with a tenacious grasp to their old books, and diffused the utterances of the Law and Prophets round them.

While this spiritual influence was in the air, the Stoics above others were likely to absorb some portion of it; for though Hellenic in its origin and logic, the moral intensity of the Stoa and its ascetic tone were Eastern. Its most celebrated teachers were drawn chiefly from the East, from the countries nearest to the Holy Land, where the Jews of the dispersion most abounded. All the currents of moral thought were meeting and mingling at that time, and it is scarcely likely that the two most distinctive should keep themselves entirely apart.

To this it has been added that Seneca himself associated freely with his slaves, and may well have heard from some of them in hours of familiar intercourse about the spiritual leaven that was working in the bosom of the Jewish synagogue, and that was soon to make the name of Christ the greatest in the civilized world.

And yet we must admit that the resemblances of tone and style do not touch the essentials of the moral system, and fail to bridge over the gulf between

the Stoic and the Christian creed. The former was Pantheistic still; its God is diffused through all the stages of creation; its providence is an inexorable fate; its Holy Spirit ebbs and flows like tidal waves through all the multitudinous realms of Nature.

The Fatherhood of God is an unmeaning phrase in such a system. Instead of filial devotion to a personal will, we have submission to an absolute law; instead of the humbling sense of sin against a perfect goodness, we have mere errors, and mistakes from ignorance of natural conditions.

Devotional language there may be, indeed, to express the fervour of emotion, kindled by the effort to pursue in thought the Absolute Being in all its endless changes through the immensities of time and space. Large thoughts like these, long brooding in the mind, may make man feel his littleness at times, and foster a sort of humility of moral bearing, but they have no power to give the tenderer saintlier graces that make up the temper of true Christian meekness. And how could it be otherwise when the same system allowed such boastful phrases as that "God surpasses the good man in this only that He is longer good,"[1] or that "the good man can excel God in the patience with which he bears the trials of his mortal lot."[2]

On the subject of immortality, again, the Stoic speaks with an uncertain sound. At one time he seems to soar with Plato into clearer air, and to believe in a personal identity remaining after death, and lasting on for end-

[1] Ep. 73. [2] De Prov. 6.

less ages. But how little hold it had on his convictions is shown by some expressions in his letters to Lucilius :—"I was pleasantly engaged in inquiring about the eternity of souls, or rather, I should say, in trusting. For I was ready to trust myself to the opinions of great men, who avow rather than prove so very acceptable a thing. I was surrendering myself to this great hope, I was beginning to be weary of myself, to despise the remaining fragments of a broken life, as though I were destined to pass away into that illimitable time, and into the possession of eternity, when I was suddenly aroused by the receipt of your letter, and this beautiful dream vanished."[1] And so we often find him balancing the two alternatives of regarding death either as a leap into utter nothingness or as the birthday of eternity (*æterni natalis*); and that even in his "Consolation," where the most reassuring thoughts that he can find are brought to bear upon the mourning Marcia. And, indeed, however wavering might be his tone upon the subject, there can be little doubt that the Stoic system could admit no faith in personal immortality. The soul's vital force might, it is true, outlive a while the shock of bodily decay, nobler spirits might survive the dissolution of the grosser beings round them, yet soon or late their turn would come to pass into new modes of life, till the whole cycle of material changes should be complete, and a period of time be closed by the great conflagration which should dissolve all combinations into chaos.

However that might be, the Stoic laid no stress on

[1] Ep. 102.

any moral sequence between the life on earth and the hereafter; the claims of justice may be met, they thought, by the good and evil of our present lot, the account of which is balanced when the last debt is paid at death.

No personal Maker had brought man into being; there was no one to call him to account for his stewardship of powers entrusted to his keeping. Instead of, "the Lord giveth, the Lord hath taken away" of our Burial Service, we read in Seneca, "Fortune has taken away my friend, but he was her gift." So the Stoic looked on suicide as his right when he seemed to risk his dignity by staying longer on the scene. It might be cowardice, indeed, or weak impatience to hurry from the common ills of life, but he trusted his own judgment—a sadly treacherous guide—to tell him when he might withdraw in honour from the stage. The literature of the times is full of illustrations of this state of feeling, and among others a passage of his letters may serve to bring it home:—"Tullius Marcellinus, whom you know so well, a young man of quiet life, but prematurely aged, was taken ill with a disease, which, though not incurable, was lingering and troublesome as requiring constant care, and began to think of death. He called into council many of his friends. Some cautiously gave him the advice they would have taken in like case; the flattering and insincere suggested what they thought he would be pleased to hear; but our Stoic friend, like a man of bold and resolute nature, to give him his real due, seems to have offered him the best

advice. For he began as follows:—'Do not vex yourself, my Marcellinus, as though you were making up your mind on a matter of great moment. Life is no grand thing. All your slaves, all kinds of animals have life; the great thing is to die with honour, prudently and bravely. Think how long you have gone through the old routine of food, and sleep, and animal desire. Not only the thoughtful and the brave and wretched, but even the faithful may wish to die.'"[1] The teaching fell on willing ears, till at times suicide became almost a fashion among the higher social circles.

There was much that was very noble in their moral standard; but the impassiveness of their ideal was a fatal error which marks at every turn the contrast between the Stoic and the Christian ethics. The paradox that pain and losses are not evils not only outraged common sense but weakened the motive force which was most needed for a movement of reform. The Gospel spirit has been called in our own times the "enthusiasm of charity." The Stoics, as we have seen, had laid stress already on the duty; their hero, in the words of Lucan, felt that he was born not for himself, but for the world at large, and turned from the carnage of the battle-field to think what the force there wasted might have done even by material efforts in the service of humanity. There might be philanthropy; there might be even a spirit of self-sacrifice, such as Seneca puts forward; but enthusiasm

[1] Ep. 77.

there could not be in a system which discouraged all emotional fervour as the sorry weakness of our lower nature. Our moralist, indeed, himself was tender and warm-hearted, because his philosophy had failed to spoil the good qualities which nature gave him. In his hands the system lost in rigorous logic what it gained in true humanity. He traces, for example, the portrait of the sage in which, true to the definition of his school, he treats compassion as unmanly weakness. "To feel pain and grief for the misfortunes of another, to weep at the sight of suffering, is a weakness unworthy of the sage, for nothing should cloud his serenity or shake his firmness. Yet he will readily do everything to which compassion prompts the souls that yield to it; he will succour the shipwrecked, welcome the exiled, and relieve the indigent. He will restore to the distracted mother her lost son, will ransom him from bondage; like the gods, will let no misery pass unnoticed, but will help those who need it most. His benevolence will reach even to those who mainly suffer their deserts, but he will not make much ado or be unmanned at the sight of a poor beggar's emaciated form or dirty rags. Only weak eyes get flushed and painful at the sight of the ophthalmia of others."[1]

We have already seen indeed that there are many passages in his letters which are quite inconsistent with such teaching, pointing as they do both by precept and example to tenderer sympathies and play

[1] Clem. ii. 6.

of natural emotions. He can only have accepted these repulsive Stoic maxims by putting a forced meaning on the words, and condemning love, pity, and resentment, when they are only passionate moods and deaf to the voice of reason. No sect, he says, has shown more love to mankind than the Stoic; and here, of course, love passes into a higher stage of rational action, free from such taint of undisciplined emotion. With Seneca himself it tends to be a mere question of words, for all the affections that a peremptory definition has proscribed are re-admitted under a thin disguise as reasonable states. But the theory itself thus stands condemned as being either false to nature, or a truism stated in most unnatural language. Its whole influence must have tended to repress emotion and check the free expression of the sympathies of social life. It appealed to the intellect indeed to undertake the corresponding duties, though without the assistance of its best ally, but it had little power to move the hearts of weak and ignorant men by terms so hard and cold, so little coloured by the loveliness of Christian graces. It spoke with force to the strong and self-contained, who felt no need of stimulus, and could be a law unto themselves, but it could scarcely fail to foster intellectual pride by raising man to the level of his God, by leaving him nothing to look up to, nothing to depend on, with no distrust of his own power to defy the loudest storms of fortune. That pride must have bordered closely on contempt for weaker natures, who had no such confidence in their own clearness of judgment

or strength of will. Such a ring of scorn we noticed in the tones of the early school when it described the helpless folly of the mass of ignorant men, and something like it may be still heard in the words of Seneca when he says, "You have no cause to be angry with them; forgive rather, for they are all mad."[1] These are surely most unlike the temper of those last words of Christ, with which they have sometimes been compared, "Father, forgive them, for they not what they do."

[1] De Benef. v. 17.

CHAPTER XII.

EPICTETUS, OR STOICISM IN THE COTTAGE.

In quitting Seneca for Epictetus we pass from one extreme of social standing to another: instead of the noble Roman, sometime favourite of the world of fashion, we enter the cell of a poor slave who had nothing to attract attention but his homely wisdom and uncompromising steadiness of moral purpose. Of his personal history little has been told us. A Phrygian by birth, he was in early life a slave of Epaphroditus, who was himself a freedman high in the good graces of the Emperor Nero. We are told that the master of Epictetus broke his slave's leg in wanton frolic, at which he only said, "I told you, master, you would break it." But the story is not confirmed by other writers, and it is more likely that he was lame and feeble from his birth. He had little kindness to expect indeed from one whose character would lead him to oppress the weak and truckle to the strong. Thus he tells us in one place, "Epaphroditus had a shoemaker whom he sold because he was good for nothing. This fellow by some good luck was bought by one of Cæsar's men, and became Cæsar's shoemaker. You should have seen what respect Epaphroditus paid to him. 'How does the good Felicion do,

I pray?' Then if any of us asked, 'What is master doing?' the answer was, he is consulting about something with Felicion. Had he not sold the man as good for nothing? Who then made him wise all at once."[1]

There was probably no sympathy for culture, almost certainly no love for the special doctrines of the Stoa in the confidant of Nero's revels, yet he gave his poor slave a liberal education, and sent him even to the lectures of the famous Musonius Rufus, one of the first teachers of the day. But the household of a wealthy Roman included its librarians, poets, rhetoricians, and philosophers, who ministered in various ways to the pride and vanity of the great men whom they served, and the master of Epictetus doubtless aimed no higher than the rest; yet freedom came in time, we know not how, and fame enough to make it needful for him to retire from Rome when Domitian put philosophy under a ban. He crossed the seas, and made Nicopolis his home henceforth, living a life of cheerful poverty, without parade, and winning many a hearer to listen to his homely words and weighty thoughts; leaving, however, nothing in literary shape behind him more than the fragments of his conversation, gathered up by the loving care of his friend and pupil, Arrian. Nothing can well be simpler and more unadorned, though the speaker often found a telling phrase or vivid figure to give force and illustration to his

[1] Epict. Diss. i. 19; Long's translation.

thought. To the same hand we also owe the "Encheiridion," or Manual, in which we have the substance of his familiar talk compressed into a few terse and pregnant pages, which form a sort of whole duty of man according to the Stoic rule of life, and which was afterwards received as the most authoritative exposition of the tenets of the sect.

Perhaps the most striking feature of his character which is thus brought before us is his deep and earnest piety, which finds expression in such passages as this:—"If we had understanding, ought we to do anything else both jointly and severally than to sing hymns and bless the Deity and to tell of His benefits? Ought we not when we are digging, and ploughing, and eating, to sing this hymn to God? 'Great is God, who has given us such implements with which we shall cultivate the earth: great is God, who has given us hands, the power of swallowing, a stomach, imperceptible growth, and the power of breathing while we sleep.' This is what we ought to sing on every occasion, and to sing the greatest and most divine hymn for giving us the faculty of comprehending these things and using a proper way. Well, then, since most of you have become blind, ought there not to be some man to fill this office, and on behalf of all to sing the hymn to God? For what else can I do, a lame, old man, than sing hymns to God? If then I were a nightingale, I would do the part of a nightingale: if I were a swan, I would do like a swan. But now I am a rational creature, and I ought to praise God: this is my work, I do it, nor will I desert this

post so long as I am allowed to keep it! and I exhort you to join in this same song."[1]

But of speculations on the nature of the Divine we have no trace in Epictetus. He speaks throughout in personal language, as of a Being distinct from the Universe on which he acts, though sometimes he adopts the popular terms of a polytheistic creed, but in a sense stripped of all its coarser adjuncts. Thus, "As to piety towards the gods you must know that this is the chief thing, to have right opinions about them, to think that they exist, and that they administer the All well and justly; and you must fix yourself in this principle to obey them, and to yield to them in everything which happens, and voluntarily to follow it as being accomplished by the wisest intelligence. For if you do so, you will never either blame the gods, nor will you accuse them of neglecting you."[2]

To the sense of the Fatherhood of God he traces the due estimate of human dignity and human duty. "If a man should be able to assent to the doctrine as he ought, that we are all sprung from God in an especial manner, and that God is the father both of men and of gods, I suppose that he would never have any ignoble or mean thoughts about himself. But if Cæsar should adopt you, no one could endure your arrogance; and if you know that you are the son of Zeus, will you not be elated? Yet we do not so; but since these two things are mingled in the generation of man, body in common with the animals, and

[1] Diss. i. 16. [2] Ench. 31.

reason and intelligence in common with the gods, many incline to this kinship which is miserable and mortal; and some few to that which is divine and happy. The few have no mean or ignoble thoughts about themselves; but with the many, it is quite contrary. For they say, What am I? a poor miserable man, with my wretched bit of flesh. Wretched, indeed; but you possess something better than your bit of flesh. Why then do you neglect that which is better, and why do you attach yourself to this?" [1]

Again, in another place he urges us to think of the duties which follow from this fellowship:—"Zeus has placed by every man a guardian, to whom he has committed the care of the man, a guardian who never sleeps, is never deceived. For to what better or more careful guardian could he have entrusted each of us? When then you have shut the doors and made darkness within, remember never to say that you are alone, for you are not; but God is within, and your dæmon is within, and what need have they of light to see what you are doing? To this God you ought to swear an oath just as the soldiers do to Cæsar. But they who are hired for pay swear to regard the safety of Cæsar before all things; and you who have received so many and such great favours, will you not swear, or when you have sworn, will you not abide by your oath? And what shall you swear? Never to be disobedient, never to make any charges, never to find fault with anything that He has given, and never unwillingly to

[1] Diss. i. 3.

do or to suffer anything that is necessary. Is this oath like the soldier's oath? The soldiers swear not to prefer any man to Cæsar; in this oath men swear to honour themselves before all." [1]

But he insists even more emphatically on the resignation which should spring from the abiding sense of kinship with the Deity. "Dare to look up to God and say, Deal with me for the future as thou wilt; I am of the same mind as thou art; I am thine: I refuse nothing that pleases thee: lead me where thou wilt: clothe me in any dress thou choosest: is it thy will that I should hold the office of a magistrate, that I should be in the condition of a private man, stay here or be an exile, be poor, be rich? I will make thy defence to men in behalf of all these conditions."

Again:—"You see that Cæsar appears to furnish us with great peace, that there are no longer enemies nor battles, nor great associations of robbers nor of pirates, but we can travel at every hour, and sail from east to west. But can Cæsar give us security from fever, also, from shipwreck, from fire, from earthquake, or from lightning? Can he from love, from sorrow, from envy? He cannot. But the doctrine of philosophers promises to give us peace even against these things. And what does it say? Men, if you will attend to me, wherever you are, whatever you are doing, you will not feel sorrow nor anger, nor compulsion nor hindrance, but you will pass your time without perturbations and free from everything. When man has this peace, not pro-

[1] Diss. i. 14. [2] Ibid. ii. 16.

claimed by Cæsar, but by God through reason, is he not content when he is alone? when he sees and reflects, now no evil can happen to me; for me there is no robber, no earthquake, everything is full of peace, full of tranquillity: every way, every city, every meeting, neighbour, companion, is harmless. One person, whose business it is, supplies me with food; another with raiment; another with perceptions and preconceptions. And if he does not supply what is necessary, he gives the signal for retreat, opens the door and says to you, 'Go.' Go whither? To nothing terrible, but to the place from whence you came, to your friends and kinsmen, to the elements."[1]

Or, again:—"God has no need of a spectator who is not satisfied. He wants those who join in the festival, those who take part in the chorus, that they may rather applaud, admire, and celebrate with hymns the solemnity. But those who can bear no trouble, and the cowardly, He will not unwillingly see absent from the great assembly; for they did not when they were present behave as they ought to do at a festival, nor fill up their place properly, but they lamented, found fault with the Deity, fortune, their companions; not seeing both what they had, and their own powers, which they received for contrary purposes, the powers of magnanimity, of a generous mind, manly spirit, and what we are now inquiring about, freedom. For what purpose then have I received these things? To use

[1] Diss. iii. 13.

them. How long? So long as He who has lent them chooses."[1]

Such sentiments, he thinks, ought to be strong enough to overrule all the weariness of life which may incline men's thoughts to suicide. "You might come to me and say, 'Epictetus, we can no longer endure being bound to this poor body, and feeding it and giving it drink and rest and cleaning it, and for the sake of the body complying with the wishes of these and of those. Are not these things indifferent and nothing to us; and is not death no evil? And are we not in a manner kinsmen of God, and did we not come from Him? Allow us to depart from the place from whence we came; allow us to be released at last from these bonds by which we are bound and weighed down. Here there are robbers and thieves and courts of justice, and those who are named tyrants, and think they have some power over us by means of the body and its possessions. Permit us to show them that they have no power over any man'; and I on my part would say, 'Friends, wait for God: when He shall give the signal and release you from this service, then go to Him; but for the present endure to dwell in this place where He has put you: short indeed is this time of your dwelling here, and easy to bear for those who are so disposed, for what tyrant, or what thief, or what courts of justice, are formidable to those who have thus considered as things of no value the body and the possessions

[1] Diss. iv. 1.

of the body? Wait, then; do not depart without a reason."[1]

The sense of the Fatherhood of God leads him to the large thought of human brotherhood, of which he speaks, like Seneca, in most emphatic language:— "When some one asked, how may a man eat acceptably to the gods, he answered: 'If he can eat justly and contentedly, and with equanimity, and temperately and orderly, will it not be also acceptable to the gods? But when you have asked for warm water and the slave has not heard, or if he did hear, has brought only tepid water, or he is not even found to be in the house, then not to be vexed or to burst with passion, is not this acceptable to the gods? How then shall a man endure such persons as this slave? Slave yourself, will you not bear with your own brother, who has Zeus for his progenitor, and is like a son from the same seeds and of the same descent from above? But if you have been put in any such higher place, will you immediately make yourself a tyrant? Will you not remember who you are, and whom you rule? that they are kinsmen, that they are brethren by nature, that they are the offspring of Zeus?' 'But I have purchased them, and they have not purchased me.' 'Do you see in what direction you are looking, that it is towards the earth, towards the pit, that it is towards these wretched laws of dead men? but towards the laws of the gods you are not looking."[2]

The same thought leads him also to give a wider

[1] Diss. i. 9. [2] Ibid. i. 13.

range to the conceptions of nationality and race:—"If the things are true which are said by the philosophers about the kinship between God and man, what else remains for man to do than what Socrates did? Never, in reply to the question to what country you belong, say that you are an Athenian or Corinthian, but that you are a citizen of the world. . . He who has observed with intelligence the administration of the world, and has learned that the greatest and supreme and the most comprehensive community is that which is composed of men and God, and that from God have descended the seeds, not only to my father and grandfather, but to all beings which are generated on the earth, and particularly to rational beings—why should not such a man call himself a citizen of the world, why not a son of God, and why should he be afraid of anything which happens among men? Is kinship with Cæsar enough to enable us to live in safety, and above contempt and without any fear at all? and to have God for your maker and father and guardian, shall not this release us from sorrows and fears"?[1]

But the strength of this piety of Epictetus appears nowhere more markedly than in the picture which he draws of the philosopher as a missionary bound by the strong sense of a religious duty to spread abroad the knowledge of God's will. It was thus Diogenes acted in old days:—"Did Diogenes love nobody, who was so kind and so much a lover of all, that for mankind

[1] Diss. i. 9.

in general he willingly undertook so much labour and bodily sufferings. He did love mankind, but how? As became a minister of God, at the same time caring for men, and being also subject to God. For this reason all the earth was his country, and no particular place; and when he was taken prisoner he did not regret Athens nor his associates and friends there, but even he became familiar with the pirates and tried to improve them; and being sold afterwards he lived in Corinth as before at Athens; and he would have behaved the same if he had gone to the country of the Perrhæbi."[1]

It is thus also that the true philosopher must act in later days:—"The true Cynic must know that he is sent a messenger from Zeus to men about good and bad things, to show them that they have wandered, and are seeking the substance of good and evil where it is not, but where it is they never think, and that he is a spy, as Diogenes was carried off to Philip after the battle of Chæronea as a spy. For, in fact, the Cynic is a spy of the things which are good for men and which are evil, and it is his duty to examine carefully and to come and report truly, and not to be struck with terror, so as to point out as enemies those who are not enemies, nor in any other way to be perturbed by appearances nor confounded." Or, again: "The thing is great, it is mystical, not a common thing, nor is it given to every man. But not even wisdom perhaps is enough to enable a man to

[1] Diss. iii. 24.

take care of youths; a man must have also a certain readiness and fitness for this purpose, and a certain quality of body, and, above all things, he must have God to advise him to occupy this office, as God advised Socrates to occupy the place of one who confutes error, Diogenes the office of royalty and reproof, and the office of teaching precepts."[1]

In the assurance of this commission from on high the missionary Cynic will bear with cheerfulness the hardships of his lot, and they are many:—"Reflect more carefully, know thyself, consult the divinity, without God attempt nothing, for if He shall advise you (to do this or anything) be assured that He intends you to become great or to receive many blows. For this very amusing quality is conjoined to a Cynic; he must be flogged like an ass, and when he is flogged he must love those who flog him, as if he were the father of all and the brother of all. . . . Do you think that if a man comes to a Cynic and salutes him, that he is the Cynic's friend, and that the Cynic will think him worthy of receiving a Cynic into his house? So that, if you please, reflect on this also, rather look round for some convenient dunghill on which you shall bear your fever, and which will shelter you from the north wind, that you may not be frozen. But you seem to me to wish to go into some man's house and to be well fed there for a time. Why, then, do you think of attempting so great a thing (as the life of a Cynic?")[2]

[1] Diss. iii. 21.

[2] Ibid. iii. 22.

He will hold himself aloof from public life in the form of politics or civil duties which will seem unworthy of his interest. "If you please, ask me also if a Cynic shall engage in the administration of the State. Fool, do you seek a greater form of administration than that in which he is engaged? Do you ask if he shall appear among the Athenians and say something about the revenues and supplies, he who must talk with all men, alike with Athenians, alike with Corinthians, alike with Romans, not about supplies, nor yet about revenues, nor about peace or war but about happiness and unhappiness, about good fortune and bad fortune, about slavery and freedom? When a man has undertaken the administration of such a state, do you ask me also if he shall govern? again I will say to you, Fool, what greater government shall he exercise than that which he exercises now?"[1]

He will have to abstain also from the blessings of domestic life, such as other men find natural and innocent. "Said the young man, 'Shall marriage and the begetting of children as a chief duty be undertaken by the Cynic?' 'If you grant me a community of wise men,' Epictetus replies, 'perhaps no man will readily apply himself to the Cynic practice. For on whose account should he undertake this manner of life? However, if we suppose that he does, nothing will prevent him from marrying and begetting children, for his wife will be another like himself, and his

[1] Diss. iii. 22.

father-in-law another like himself, and his children will be brought up like himself. But in the present state of things, which is like that of an army placed in battle order, is it not fit that the Cynic should, without any distraction, be employed only on the ministration of God, able to go about among men, not tied down to the common duties of mankind, nor entangled in the ordinary relations of life, which if he neglects, he will not maintain the character of an honourable and good man? and if he observes them, he will lose the character of the messenger and spy and herald of God.' 'Yes, but Crates took a wife.' 'You are speaking of a circumstance which arose from love and of a woman who was another Crates. But we are inquiring about ordinary marriages and those which are free from distractions, and making this inquiry we do not find the affair of marriage in this state of the world a thing which is especially suited to the Cynic.'"[1]

Yet these counsels are intended only for the men engaged in missionary work, for others may enjoy the social pleasures that they innocently can if they see that their will is not enfeebled or entangled by them. "As on a voyage when the vessel has reached a port, if you go out to get water it is an amusement by the way to pick up a shell-fish or some bulb, but your thoughts ought to be directed to the ship, and you ought to be constantly watching if the captain should call, and then you must throw away all those things,

[1] Diss. iii. 22.

that you may not be bound and pitched into the ship like sheep; so in life also, if there be given to you instead of a little bulb and a shell a wife and a child, there will be nothing to prevent (you from taking them). But if the captain should call, run to the ship, and leave all those things without regard to them. But if you are old, do not even go far from the ship, lest when you are called you make default."[1]

In any case we must be always ready to resign the blessings which God's Providence has lent us for awhile. "Never say about anything I have lost it, but say I have restored it. Is your child dead? It has been restored. Is your wife dead? She has been restored. Has your estate been taken from you? Has not then this been also restored? 'But he who has taken it from me is a bad man.' But what is it to you by whose hands the giver demanded it back? So long as he may allow you, take care of it as a thing which belongs to another, as travellers do with their inn."[2]

But, indeed, there are few concessions to our human weakness in the pages of this moralist. Nowhere is the rigour of Stoic self-control more sternly stated than by Epictetus, and most of the striking paradoxes of the school find expression in his pages. Those things alone are good or evil in his sight which lie within our power to do or shun; the list of things indifferent includes most of what men care for in their common life; the will alone should make or mar

[1] Ench., 7. [2] Ibid. 11.

the happiness of any moral agent; desire, regret, complaint, or pity are only forms of misplaced weakness in regard to all the gifts and accidents of fortune.

"Remember that in life you ought to behave as at a banquet. Suppose that something is carried round and is opposite to you. Stretch out your hand and take a portion with decency. Suppose that it passes by you. Do not detain it. Suppose that it is not yet come to you. Do not send your desire forward to it, but wait till it is opposite to you. Do so with respect to children, so with respect to a wife, so with respect to magisterial offices, so with respect to wealth, and you will be some time a worthy partner of the banquets of the gods. But if you take none of the things which are set before you, and even despise them, then you will be not only a fellow-banqueter with the gods, but also a partner with them in power. For by acting thus Diogenes and Heracleitus and those like them were deservedly divine, and were so called."[1]

Another passage consistently extends this absence of emotion to the losses or apparent misfortunes of our fellows:—"When you see a person weeping in sorrow either when a child goes abroad or when he is dead, or when the man has lost his property, take care that the appearance do not hurry you away with it as if he were suffering in external things. But straightway make a distinction in your mind, and be

[1] Ench., 15.

in readiness to say, it is not that which has happened that afflicts this man, for it does not afflict another, but it is the opinion about this thing which afflicts the man. So far as words, then, do not be unwilling to show him sympathy, and even if it happens so, to lament with him. But take care that you do not lament internally also."[1]

The leading tenets of the school, as stated in his uncompromising language, do violence to the instincts of the heart, and are false to the balance and harmony of human nature. But there is no trace of arrogance or affectation in himself; throughout there is a ring of genuine conviction in his words. It may move our spleen sometimes to hear a Seneca declaim in praise of poverty while surrounded by all the signs of luxury and wealth: his moral attitude at times might well discredit the fine theories about the calm of Stoic self-control. But Epictetus practised what he preached; the lame, old man, for whom fortune seemed to do so little, limited his wants to the barest rudiments of food and shelter, and actually rose by strength of will and cheerful piety into a state of happiness, unclouded by the cares and anxieties of common life. He really found the things "indifferent which lie between the virtues and the vices, wealth, health, life, death, pleasure, and pain."[2]

There is nothing gloomy or fanatic in his ascetic practice; no courting discomfort for its own sake,

[1] Ench., 16. [2] Diss. iii. 19.

nothing like the hair-shirt, and dirt, and maceration of many a later hermit. "If a Cynic is an object of compassion, he seems to be a beggar; all persons turn away from him, all are offended with him: for neither ought he to appear dirty, so that he shall not also in this respect drive away men; but his very roughness ought to be clean and attractive."[1] Or, again, "We ought not by the appearance of the body to deter the multitude from philosophy; but as in other things a philosopher should show himself cheerful and tranquil, so also he should in the things that relate to the body. See, ye men, that I have nothing, that I want nothing; see how I am without a house, and without a city, and an exile, if it happens to be so, and without a hearth, I live more free from trouble and more happily than all of noble birth, and than the rich. But look at my poor body also, and observe that it is not injured by my hard way of living. But if a man says this to me who has the appearance and face of a condemned man, what god shall persuade me to approach philosophy, if it makes men such persons? Far from it, I would not choose to do so even if I were going to become a wise man. I indeed would rather that a young man, who is making his first movements towards philosophy, should come to me with his hair carefully trimmed than with it dirty and rough, for there is seen in him a certain notion of beauty and a desire of that which is becoming; and where he supposes it to be, there also he strives that it shall be."[2]

[1] Diss. iii. 22. [2] Ibid. iv. 11.

Yet there is no doubt upon the whole that Epictetus is a Cynic rather than a Stoic; he will allow no compromise between the rigour of theory and the claims of common sense; he will do nothing to soften the hard outlines of his ἀπάθεια; his teaching is an ineffectual protest against the richness and manysidedness of civilized life. In his own case its sternness and rigour are disguised by the modesty of his language and the beauty of his devotional fervour; but it was powerless to move the masses, for it had no charm to heal the wounds and soothe the sufferings of stricken manhood, while with the strong and self-contained it might easily feed a sort of Pharisaic pride which would thank God that it was not as other men. The following is the dying speech which Epictetus puts into the Cynic's mouth :—

"If death surprises me when I am busy about these things, it is enough for me if I can stretch out my hands to God and say: The means which I have received from thee for seeing thy administration of the world and following it I have not neglected: I have not dishonoured thee by my acts: see how I have used my perceptions: have I ever blamed thee? have I been discontented with anything that happens, or wished it to be otherwise? have I wished to transgress the relations of things? That thou hast given me life, I thank thee for what thou hast given: so long as I have used the things which are thine I am content; take them back and place them wherever thou mayest choose; for thine were all things, thou

gavest them to me. Is it not enough to depart in this state of mind, and what life is better and more becoming than that of a man who is in this state of mind, and what end is more happy?"[1]

[1] Diss. iv. 10.

CHAPTER XIII

MARCUS AURELIUS ANTONINUS, OR STOICISM ON THE THRONE.

It may seem a long step from the cottage to the throne, from the slave-born Epictetus to Marcus Aurelius, the philosophic Emperor of the great Roman world, but there should be no respect of persons in religion, and philosophy by this time had become religious in its principles and tones. It had ceased to care much for abstract theory or dialectic, and aspired almost exclusively to guide the consciences of earnest men. In no one is this tendency more marked than in the gentle prince whose character, far more even than his lofty station, graced the long muster roll of Stoic worthies.

A few lines may be useful first to bring before our memories the course of his career and the conditions of his age. He was not born in the purple, like a sovereign of modern days, nor exposed from the very first to the temptations of the court, but he soon rose to high estate, and passed as an adopted son into the family of Antoninus, whose virtues made him known to later history under the name of Pius. No pains were spared to train him worthily for the responsibilities of future greatness. Besides the watchful tenderness of his home circle, and the ripe experience of

Antoninus, he profited by the intercourse and guidance of the first teachers of the day, whose lessons fell on willing ears. But he soon passed from lighter studies and from purely literary themes, to the graver thoughts of an inquiring spirit, anxious to drink deeply at the sources of all heathen knowledge. The earnest words which he penned towards the close of his career, in the journal meant only for his personal use, may serve to show how strongly he recognised his obligations to his early mentors, and how varied were the influences which helped to form his character and enrich his thought. "From my mother [I learned] piety and beneficence, and abstinence, not only from evil deeds, but even from evil thoughts; and further, simplicity in my way of living, far removed from the habits of the rich.[1] From Diognetus . . . . . to have become intimate with philosophy; and to have been a hearer, first of Bacchius, then of Tandasis and Marcianus; and to have desired a plank bed and skin, and whatever else of the kind belongs to the Grecian discipline.[2] From Rusticus I received the impression that my character required improvement and discipline; and from him I learned not to be led astray to sophistic emulation, nor to writing on speculative matters. . . . nor to showing myself off as a man who practises much discipline, or does benevolent acts in order to make a display; . . . and I am indebted to him for being acquainted with the discourses of Epictetus, which he com-

[1] "The Thoughts of M. Aurelius Antoninus"; translated by G. Long, i. 3.

[2] "Thoughts," i. 6.

municated to me out of his own collection.[1] From Apollonius I learned . . . . to see clearly in a living example that the same man can be both resolute and yielding, and not peevish in giving his instruction; and to have had before my eyes a man who clearly considered his experience and his skill in expounding philosophical principles as the smallest of his merits.[2] From Sextus, a benevolent disposition, and the example of a family governed in a fatherly manner, and the idea of living conformably to nature: and gravity without affectation . . . . . and to tolerate ignorant persons.[3] From Fronto I learned to observe what envy, and duplicity, and hypocrisy are in a tyrant, and that generally those among us who are called Patricians are rather deficient in paternal affection.[4] From Severus I learned to love my kin, and to love truth, and to love justice, and through him I learned to know Thrasea, Helvidius, Cato, Dion, Brutus; and from him I received the idea of a polity in which there is the same law for all, a polity administered with regard to equal rights and equal freedom of speech, and the idea of a kingly government which respects most of all the freedom of the governed; I learned from him also consistency and undeviating steadiness in my regard for philosophy; and a disposition to do good, and to give to others readily, and to cherish good hopes, and to believe that I am loved by my friends.[5] From Maximus I

[1] "Thoughts," i. 7. [2] "Thoughts," i. 8.
[3] "Thoughts," i. 9. [4] "Thoughts," i. 11.
[5] "Thoughts," i. 14.

learned self-government, and not to be led aside by anything; and cheerfulness in all circumstances as well as in illness, and a just admixture in the moral character of sweetness and dignity, and to do what was set before me without complaining. I observed that everybody believed that he thought as he spoke, and that in all that he did he never had any bad intention; and he never showed amazement and surprise, and was never in a hurry, and never put off doing a thing, nor was perplexed nor dejected, nor did he ever laugh to disguise his vexation, nor, on the other hand, was he ever passionate or suspicious.[1] To the gods I am indebted for having good grandfathers, good parents, a good sister, good teachers, good associates, good kinsmen and friends, nearly everything good. . . . I am thankful that I was subjected to a ruler and a father who was able to take away all pride from me, and to bring me to the knowledge that it is possible for a man to live in a palace without wanting either guards or embroidered dresses, or torches and statues, and such-like show; but that it is in such a man's power to bring himself very near to the fashion of a private person, without being for this reason either meaner in thought, or more remiss in action, with respect to the things which must be done for the public interest in a manner that befits a ruler."[2]

But Marcus Aurelius had little leisure to become the studious recluse, to which perhaps his tastes inclined him most. Marked out in early life for the

[1] "Thoughts," i. 15. [2] "Thoughts," i. 17.

succession to the throne by Antoninus, he was trained under his experienced eye to bear the burden of the cares of state. On the emperor's death he shared the throne awhile with Lucius Verus, but after a few years became the sole sovereign of the Roman world, with all the onerous responsibilities of absolute power. The task that lay before him was enormous. The efficiency of every part of the great machine of government depended on his watchfulness and wisdom; from him the rank and the authority of the official classes were derived, and to him in every case of doubt they naturally turned for sanction and for guidance. The boundaries of the Empire stretched to the furthest limits of the civilized world, and all the lands which it included looked to the Cæsar on the throne as the one central source of law and order. Marcus Aurelius was indeed no brilliant ruler, and had no high ambition with far-reaching plans, but he sincerely wished to make his subjects happy, and spent in their service anxious and laborious years. His gentle nature was best suited for the quiet days of peace when he could find leisure among the cares of civil government for his philanthropic schemes, could succour the poor and needy, provide endowments for the orphaned, and see that every class of suitors had prompt justice done them. But untoward destiny required him to spend the best years of his life in an inglorious warfare with enemies unknown to fame. Some passionate impulse seemed to pass like a fiery cross along the borders, and barbarous hordes came swarming up with fury to the attack, and threatened to burst the

barriers raised against them. The Parthians had been humbled for a time by Trajan, but were soon to show themselves in arms once more. The Moors of Africa were on the move, and before long were sweeping over Spain with havoc and desolation in their track. The Caledonians of the far West were irritated more than frightened by the long lines of wall and dyke which had been built to shut them in, and their untamed fierceness was enough to make the Roman troops retire before the children of the mist. From the mouth of the Dniester to where the Rhine bears to the sea the waters of all its tributary rivers a multitude of restless tribes with uncouth names and unknown antecedents, Teutonic, Slave, Finnish, and Tartar, were roaming in hostile guise along the northern frontiers, and ready to burst in at every unguarded point.[1] This was not all: early in his reign great floods and famine had spread desolation through the centre of the Empire; later on the soldiers who came back from the wars in Parthia brought with them the fatal seeds of plague, and spread them rapidly through all the countries of the West. The famous Galen was called in to try all that medical experience and skill could do, but his efforts failed to check the ravages of pestilence, or bring its victims back to health. The scourge passed on with steady course from land to land, leaving a track of panic and desolation where it stalked along. To this long list of misfortunes should be added the treasonous disloyalty which cast a cloud of suspicion

[1] Cf. "The Age of the Antonines."

and anxiety over the last years of his life. One of his best generals, Avidius Cassius, was known to have long chafed at what he thought the need of a stronger hand to grapple with abuses and misgovernment, and now, at a false rumour of the emperor's death, he rose with his army in the East and proclaimed himself a sovereign ruler. The movement was short-lived indeed, but the danger had been very real, and there were ugly suspicions of disloyalty in the Senate and the official circles, which did not spare even the wife of the emperor himself. There was enough in the conditions of the age to task the energies of the most resourceful and resolute of rulers, but it seemed a strange irony of fortune which set the sensitive and tender-hearted Antoninus to the roughest work of politics and war. He was perhaps too unsuspicious and forbearing to cleanse the Augean stables of corruption in the public service; he had too little of the soldier's tastes to make himself a name in history, like Trajan, as a great strategist or conqueror.

But at least his lessons of philosophy had taught him not to spare himself when duty called. He was not content to leave the distant legions to make head against the savage foes; he would not depute to lesser men the post of danger when the Empire's safety seemed at stake, but he left the court and Rome, and all the comforts which his quiet meditative nature prized, and faced the worst inclemencies of wintry warfare on the frontiers, where more than half his standing army was encamped for years, or was doing battle with the swarms of multitudinous invaders. While

there engaged in uncongenial duties, amid the clash of arms and the bustle of the camp, he found solace and distraction in the quiet hours of loneliness, when he could muse upon the problems of life, and the high themes of duty, and the mysteries that lie before and after.

We may still read the meditations written by him in his journal at such times; they are simple and unaffected in their style, intended probably to meet no eye but his own, but nowhere else is the morality of paganism couched in so pure and high and reverent a spirit. The distinctive features of the Stoic creed have been described already at sufficient length, and among them the less pleasing qualities which seemed to be the natural outcome of the system, though often toned down and disguised by writers whose instincts perhaps were better than their logic. It must be of interest to us to note how far the ideal of the emperor's aspirations could be freed from the disfigurements of such unlovely tenets of the school which he professed to follow.

The Pantheism of the earlier thinkers was expressed at times, as we have seen, with a glow of lyric and devotional fervour which reads like the language of true prayer, and the following strains of piety, enthusiastic as they are, might possibly belong to such a creed:—"Everything harmonizes with me which is harmonious to thee, O Universe. Nothing for me is too early nor too late, which is in due time for thee. Everything is fruit to me, which thy seasons bring, O Nature: from thee are all things: in thee

are all things: to thee all things return. The poet says, 'Dear city of Cecrops,' and wilt thou not say, 'Dear city of Zeus?'[1] "'The earth loves the shower,' and 'the solemn æther loves;' and the universe loves to make whatever is about to be. I say then to the universe, that I love as thou lovest. And is not this too said that this or that loves to be produced?"[2] The same may be said also of the striking passage in which he dwells on the rich variety of natural beauty with a delicacy and refinement which Stoicism hitherto had done little to encourage: "Even the things which follow after the things which are produced according to nature contain something pleasing and attractive. . . . . Figs, when they are quite ripe, gape open; and in the ripe olives the very circumstance of their being near to rottenness adds a peculiar beauty to the fruit. And the ears of corn bending down, and the lion's eyebrows, and the foam which flows from the mouth of wild boars, and many other things . . . . help to adorn them, and they please the mind; so that if a man should have a feeling and deeper insight with respect to the things which are produced in the universe, there is hardly one of those which follow by way of consequence which will not seem to him to be in a manner disposed so as to give pleasure. And so he will see even the real gaping jaws of wild beasts with no less pleasure than those which painters and sculptors show by imitation, and in an old woman and an old man he will be able to see a certain ma-

[1] "Thoughts," iv. 23. [2] "Thoughts," x. 21.

turity and comeliness, and the attractive loveliness of young persons he will be able to look on with chaste eyes; and many such things will present themselves, not pleasing to every man, but to him only who has become truly familiar with Nature and her works."[1]

But his child-like trust and reverence find voice more often in the terms which no Pantheist could consistently adopt, as when he says, "To go away from among men, if there are gods, is not a thing to be afraid of, for the gods will not involve thee in evil; but if, indeed, they do not exist, or if they have no concern about human affairs, what is it to me to live in a universe devoid of gods or devoid of providence? But in truth they do exist, and they do care for human things, and they have put all the means in man's power to enable him not to fall into real evils."[2] "Why dost thou not wait in tranquillity for thy end, whether it is extinction or removal to another state? And until that time comes, what is sufficient? Why, what else than to venerate the gods and bless them, and to do good to men, and to practise tolerance and self-restraint; but as to everything which is beyond the limits of thy poor flesh and breath, to remember that this is neither thine nor in thy power."[3]

He has no abstruse theories about the nature of the heavenly beings, but his heart and reason tell him that they are, and that is enough for reverence

[1] "Thoughts," iii. 2. [2] "Thoughts," ii. 11. [3] "Thoughts," v. 33.

and love. "To those who ask,—'Where hast thou seen the gods, or how dost thou comprehend that they exist and so worshippest them?' I answer, in the first place, that they may be seen even with the eyes; in the second place, neither have I seen even my own soul, and yet I honour it. Thus then with respect to the gods, from what I constantly experience of their power, from this I comprehend that they exist, and I venerate them."[1]

Thanks to their inspiration virtuous life is possible for man. "I thank the gods . . . . that I received clear and frequent impressions about living according to nature, and what kind of life that is, so that, so far as depended on the gods, and their gifts, and help, and inspirations, nothing hindered me from forthwith living according to nature, though I still fall short of it through my own fault, and through not observing the admonitions of the gods, and, I may almost say, their direct instructions."[2]

They bear even with the evil, and bless them with their mercies. "The gods, who are immortal, are not vexed because during so long a time they must tolerate continually men such as they are, and so many of them bad, and besides this, they also take care of them in all ways. But thou, who art destined to end so soon, art thou wearied of enduring the bad, and this too when thou art one of them?"[3]

They, or He, for his language here as elsewhere is undecided, welcome the penitent with hopes of pardon.

[1] "Thoughts," xii. 28. [2] "Thoughts," i. 17.
[3] "Thoughts," vii. 70.

"If thou didst ever see a hand cut off, or a foot, or a head, lying anywhere apart from the rest of the body, such does a man make himself, as far as he can, who is not content with what happens, and separates himself from others, or does anything unsocial. Suppose that thou hast detached thyself from the natural unity—for thou wast made by nature a part, but now thou hast cut thyself off—yet here there is this beautiful provision, that it is in thy power again to unite thyself. God has allowed this to no other part, after it has been separated and cut asunder, to come together again. But consider the kindness by which He has distinguished man, for He has put it in his power not to be separated at all from the universal; and when he has been separated He has allowed him to return and to be united, and to resume his place as a part."[1]

This leads him to what seems a new conception of the holiness which man may reach, something distinct from the self-conscious pride of heathen virtue, and more akin to saintlier ideals, as resting on a new motive which ancient moralists had rarely urged. "Reverence that which is best in the universe, and this is that which makes use of all things and directs all things. And in like manner also reverence that which is best in thyself, and this is of the same kind as that."[2]

Or, more explicitly, "There remains that which is peculiar to the good man, to be pleased and content with what happens, and with the thread which is

[1] "Thoughts," viii. 34. [2] "Thoughts," v. 21.

spun for him, and not to defile the divinity which is planted in his breast, nor disturb it by a crowd of images, but to preserve it tranquil, following it obediently as a god, neither saying anything contrary to the truth, nor doing anything contrary to justice. And if all men refuse to believe that he lives a simple, modest, and contented life, he is neither angry with any of them, nor does he deviate from the way which leads to the end of life, to which a man ought to come pure, tranquil, ready to depart, and without any compulsion perfectly reconciled to his lot."[1]

Yet he does not count himself "to have apprehended, or to be already perfect." "Thou wilt soon die, and thou art not yet simple, nor free from perturbations, nor without suspicion of being hurt by external things, nor kindly disposed towards all; nor dost thou yet place wisdom only in acting justly."[2] "Simple and modest is the work of philosophy," he says elsewhere; "draw me not aside to insolence and pride."[3] This is in a different strain from the offensive language of Chrysippus, who is reported to have said that "the wise man was as necessary to Zeus as Zeus to the wise man."

The very strength of the religious convictions of this earnest thinker leads him to deny the reality of much that common sense calls evil. "If there was anything evil, the gods would have provided for this also, that it should be altogether in a man's power not to fall into it. Now that which does not make a

[1] "Thoughts," iii. 16. [2] "Thoughts," iv. 37.
[3] "Thoughts," ix. 29.

man worse, how can it make a man's life worse? But neither through ignorance, nor having the knowledge, but not the power to guard against or correct these things, is it possible that the nature of the universe has overlooked them; nor is it possible that it has made so great a mistake, either through want of power or want of skill, that good and evil should happen indiscriminately to the good and the bad. But death, certainly, and life, honour and dishonour, pain and pleasure, all these things equally happen to good men and bad, being things which make us neither better nor worse, therefore, they are neither good nor evil."[1] The optimism may seem indeed unnaturally strained, and to be fatally in conflict with the experience of our common manhood, but at least we have here no arrogance of paradox, no lofty airs of scorn for the weakness and the suffering which cannot freely breathe in those serener heights.

He urges emphatically enough that "the kingdom of heaven is within us." "Look within," he says; "within is the fountain of good, and it will ever bubble up, if thou wilt dig."[2] Yet it cometh not with observation. There should be something almost unconscious and instinctive in true virtue. "One man, when he has done a service to another, is ready to set it down to his account as a favour conferred. Another is not ready to do this, but still in his own mind he thinks of the man as his debtor, and he knows what he has done. A third, in a manner, does

[1] "Thoughts," ii. 11. [2] "Thoughts," vii. 59.

not even know what he has done, but he is like a vine which has produced grapes, and seeks for nothing more after it has once produced its proper fruit. As a horse when he has run, a dog when he has tracked the game, a bee when it has made the honey, so a man, when he has done a good act, does not call out for others to come and see, but he goes on to another act, as a vine goes on to produce again the grapes in season. Must a man then be one of these, who, in a manner, act thus without observing it? Yes—but this very thing is necessary, the observation of what a man is doing, for it may be said, it is characteristic of the social animal to perceive that he is working in a social manner, and indeed to wish that his social partner also should perceive it. . . . If thou wilt choose to understand the meaning of what is said, do not fear that for this reason thou wilt omit any social act."[1] There was something of braggart ostentation almost always in the ideal of the Stoic, who seemed to pose himself overmuch before the eyes of men, and to wrap himself obtrusively in the cloak of his own virtue, while he defied the gusts of angry fortune. Marcus Aurelius at least was free from any suspicion of such boastful pride. The earlier writers of the school had given a wide range to man's social duties when they made him a citizen of the world at large, bound to promote the interests of others, but they looked to the intellect alone to prompt his action, and mistrusted all strong feeling as a saving guide. But with our moralist benevolence becomes enthusiastic,

[1] "Thoughts," v. 6.

and a source of keen pleasure to the agent. "Just as it is with the members in those bodies which are united in one, so it is with rational beings which exist separate, for they have been constituted for one co-operation. And the perception of this will be more apparent to thee, if thou often sayest to thyself that I am a member [μέλος] of the system of rational beings. But if thou sayest that thou art a part [μέρος], thou dost not yet love men from thy heart; beneficence does not yet delight thee for its own sake; thou still doest it barely as a thing of propriety, and not yet as doing good to thyself."[1]

He speaks in a new strain of the pleasures of sympathy:—"When thou wishest to delight thyself, think of the virtues of those who live with thee; for instance, the activity of one, and the modesty of another, and the liberality of a third, and some other good quality of a fourth. For nothing delights so much as the examples of the virtues, when they are exhibited in the morals of those who live with us and present themselves in abundance, as far as is possible."[2]

He is not afraid even of the sentiment of pity, which sterner natures had regarded as unmanly weakness:—"The things from the gods merit veneration for their excellence; and the things from men should be dear to us by reason of kinship; and sometimes even, in a manner, they move our pity by reason of men's ignorance of good and bad; this

[1] "Thoughts," vii. 13. [2] "Thoughts," vi. 48.

defect being not less than that which deprives us of the power of distinguishing things that are white and black."[1]

Virtue, he thinks, should give herself no airs, nor look too sternly on the vices and the follies of mankind but wear a cheerful and engaging smile upon her face. "A scowling look is altogether unnatural; when it is often assumed, the result is that all comeliness dies away, and at last is so completely extinguished that it cannot be again lighted up at all. Try to conclude from this very fact that it is contrary to reason."[2]

Severer Stoics held in despite of common sense that there were no venial errors and no degrees of heinousness in vice. Not so said Antoninus.

"Theophrastus in his comparison of bad acts—such a comparison as one would make in accordance with the common notions of mankind—says, like a true philosopher, that the offences which are committed through desire are more blameable than those which are committed through anger. For he who is excited by anger seems to turn away from reason with a certain pain and unconscious contraction; but he who offends through desire, being overpowered by pleasure, seems to be in a manner more intemperate and more womanish in his offences. Rightly then, and in a manner worthy of philosophy, he said that the offence which is committed with pleasure is more blameable than that which is committed with pain; and, on the whole, the one is more like a person who has been first wronged and through pain is compelled

[1] "Thoughts," ii. 13. [2] "Thoughts," vii. 24.

to be angry; but the other is moved by his own impulse to do wrong, being carried towards doing something by desire."[1]

How gently he could act the censor's part we read in passages like these, which show how carefully he shunned all airs of superiority or moral scorn :—"Suppose any man shall despise me. Let him look to that himself. But I will look to this, that I be not discovered doing or saying anything deserving of contempt. Shall any man hate me. Let him look to it. But I will be mild and benevolent towards every man, and ready to show even him his mistake, not reproachfully, nor yet as making a display of my endurance, but nobly and honestly, like the great Phocion, unless indeed he only assumed it."[2]

"Consider that a good disposition is invincible, if it be genuine, and not an affected smile and acting a part. For what will the most violent man do to thee, if thou continuest to be of a kind disposition towards him, and if as opportunity offers, thou gently admonishest him and calmly correctest his errors at the very time when he is trying to do thee harm, saying, 'Not so, my child; we are constituted by nature for something else. I shall certainly not be injured, but thou art injuring thyself, my child :' and show him with gentle tact and by general principles that this is so, and that even bees do not do as he does, nor any animals which are formed by nature to be gregarious?

"And thou must do this neither with any double

[1] "Thoughts," ii. 10. [2] "Thoughts," xi. 13.

meaning nor in the way of reproach, but affectionately and without any rancour in thy soul; and not as if thou wert lecturing him, nor yet that any bystander may admire. . . . Let this truth be present to thee in the excitement of anger, that to be moved by passion is not manly; but that mildness and gentleness, as they are more agreeable to human nature, so also are they more manly; and he who possesses these qualities possesses strength, nerves and courage, and not the man who is subject to fits of passion and discontent."[1]

He would return good for evil, and disarm malevolence with loving patience.

"Suppose that men kill thee, cut thee in pieces, curse thee. What then can these things do to prevent thy mind from remaining pure, wise, sober, just? For instance, if a man should stand by a limpid pure spring, and curse it, the spring never ceases sending up potable water; and if he should cast clay into it or filth, it will speedily disperse them and wash them out, and will not be at all polluted. How then shalt thou possess a perpetual fountain? By forming thyself hourly to freedom conjoined with contentment, simplicity and modesty."[2]

But there is a tone of plaintive melancholy at times which shows us that the emperor wearied often of the cares of state, and found it no easy thing to deal so gently with the follies of mankind. The very evidence of the struggle proves that his philosophy was not reserved only for his books :—

[1] "Thoughts," xi. 18. [2] "Thoughts," viii. 51.

"Thou wilt consider this when thou art dying, and thou wilt depart more contentedly by reflecting thus: I am going away from such a life, in which even my associates in behalf of whom I have striven so much, prayed and cared, themselves wish me to depart, hoping perchance to get some little advantage by it. Why, then, should a man cling to a longer stay here? Do not, however, for this reason go away less kindly disposed to them, but preserving thy own character, and friendly and benevolent and mild, and on the other hand, not as if thou wast torn away; but as when a man dies a quiet death, the poor soul is easily separated from the body, such also ought thy departure from men to be."[1]

Though he tries to be one in spirit with his subjects, yet he feels the loneliness of intellectual isolation. "Short is the little which remains to thee of life. Live as on a mountain. For it makes no difference whether a man lives here or there, if he lives everywhere in the world as in a state. Let men see, let them know a real man who lives according to nature. If they cannot endure him, let them kill him. For that is better than to live thus [as men do]."[2]

"Soon, very soon, thou wilt be ashes, or a skeleton, and either a name or not even a name; but name is sound and echo. And the things which are much valued in life are empty, and rotten, and trifling, and [like] little dogs biting one another, and little children quarrelling, laughing, and then straightway weeping.

[1] "Thoughts," x. 36. [2] "Thoughts," x. 15.

But fidelity, and modesty, and justice, and truth are fled

"Up to Olympus from the wide-spread earth."—(HESIOD.)

"What then is there which still detains thee here? . . . To have good repute amidst such a world as this is an empty thing. Why, then, dost thou not wait in tranquillity for thy end, whether it is extinction or removal to another state? And until that time comes what is sufficient? Why, what else than to venerate the gods and bless them, and to do good to men, and to practise tolerance and self-restraint; but as to everything which is beyond the limits of the poor flesh and breath, to remember that this is neither thine nor in thy power."[1]

But if we ask what hopes he entertained of a life beyond the grave, we shall find that his judgment wavers on the subject. On the one hand he seems to be assured of a personal immortality for men of worth:—"How can it be that the gods after having arranged all things well and benevolently for mankind, have overlooked this alone, that some men, and very good men, and men who, as we may say, have had most communion with the Divinity, and through pious acts and religious observances have been most intimate with the Divinity, when they have once died should never exist again, but should be completely extinguished? But if this is so, be assured that if it ought to have been otherwise, the gods would have done it. For if it were just, it would also be possible; and if it were according

[1] "Thoughts," v. 33.

to nature, nature would have had it so. But because it is not so, if in fact it is not so, be thou convinced that it ought not to have been so: for thou seest even of thyself that in this inquiry thou art disputing with the Deity; and we should not thus dispute with the gods, unless they were most excellent and most just; but if this is so, they would not have allowed anything in the ordering of the universe to be neglected unjustly and irrationally."[1] But another passage leaves a different impression on the mind, and is more consonant with the ordinary tenets of the school:—"If souls continue to exist, how does the air contain them from eternity? But how does the earth contain the bodies of those who have been buried from time so remote? For as here the mutation of these bodies after a certain continuance, whatever it may be, and their dissolution make room for other dead bodies; so the souls which are removed into the air after subsisting for some time are transmuted and diffused, and assume a fiery nature by being received into the seminal intelligence of the universe, and in this way make room for the fresh souls which come to dwell there. And this is the answer which a man might give on the hypothesis of souls continuing to exist."[2]

But though there was this uncertainty about the future, there was none as to the duties of the present life, and no moody doubts had power to cloud his peaceful serenity of temper:—"As to the animals which have no reason and generally all things and

[1] "Thoughts," xii. 5. [2] "Thoughts," iv. 21.

objects, do thou, since thou hast reason and they have none, make use of them with a generous and liberal spirit. But towards human beings, as they have reason, behave in a social spirit. And on all occasions call on the gods, and do not perplex thyself about the length of time in which thou shalt do this; for even three hours so spent are sufficient."[1] "Take care that thou are not made into a Cæsar, that thou art not dyed with this dye; for such things happen. Keep thyself then simple, good, pure, serious, free from affectation, a friend of justice, a worshipper of the gods, kind, affectionate, strenuous in all proper acts. Strive to continue such as philosophy wished to make thee. Reverence the gods and help men. Short is life. There is only one fruit of this terrene life, a pious disposition and social acts. Do everything as a disciple of Antoninus. Remember his constancy in every act which was conformable to reason, and his evenness in all things, and his piety and the serenity of his countenance, and his sweetness, and his disregard of empty fame, . . . and how he bore with those who blamed him unjustly, without blaming them in return; how he did nothing in a hurry; and how he listened not to calumnies; and how exact an examiner of manners and actions he was; and not given to reproach people, nor timid, nor suspicious, nor a sophist; . . . and how he tolerated freedom of speech in those who opposed his opinions; and the pleasure which he had when any man showed him anything better; and how religious

[1] "Thoughts," vi. 23.

he was without superstition. Imitate all this, that thou mayest have as good a conscience, when thy last hour comes, as he had."[1]

Truly the man who could cultivate such graces was not far from the kingdom of heaven, and was in sympathy much nearer to the Christian ideal than to the pride of Stoic apathy. But they cannot be regarded as the natural outcome of the system of philosophy which he professed. There is no logical connection between the practical maxims and the central dogmas. The currents of Platonic thought seem largely blended with the special doctrines of the Porch, for morality had now become many-sided and eclectic, but, above all, the various elements were fused and coloured by the warmth of his own delicate and noble nature which transfigured the coldness and the poverty of the Stoic creed.

Later ages have not ceased to marvel how an emperor so humane, who approached so nearly to the Christian graces as did Antoninus, could have sanctioned any persecution of the Christian Church. The fact itself cannot be reasonably questioned, in spite of the well-meant efforts to discredit it. Tertullian, it is true, a few years later speaks of him as a merciful protector, as not, indeed, annulling the existing laws against the Christians, but as weakening their force by measures which repressed the persecuting zeal of the informers.[2]

Pious fancy, too, has fondly dwelt upon the story

[1] "Thoughts," vi. 30. [2] Tertullian, "Apologia," 5.

of the Christian soldiers whose prayers brought rain from heaven in the dire strait of his campaign against the Quadi, and on the edict in which the grateful emperor proclaimed the entire freedom of the Church. But the document is hopelessly at variance with undoubted facts, and even with the passage of Tertullian just referred to, though the language of both attests that the Christians of the next generation thought that the emperor had borne them no ill-will, whatever might have been the sentiment and action of officials far away. Church history tells us of the martyrs on whom the sentence was pronounced by his vice-regents, or whose cases were carried even by appeal before the bar of Cæsar. The Christians are spoken of as obstinate fanatics in his "Meditations"; the obstinate profession of their faith was still treated as a crime, though the civil power made no attempt to hunt them down. A fact so strange may naturally seem to call for comment. Rome had, indeed, its national religion as by law established, and the emperors were defenders of the faith. But its polytheism was many-sided and elastic, and found a niche in its Pantheon for every new form of Eastern worship. The Stoic system, on its side, had always treated the popular religion with forbearance and with little of the caustic tones of earlier free-thought. There was no tradition of intolerance, therefore, borrowed from the temple or the philosophic school, and the character of the ruler on the throne seemed wholly alien to such a temper. He was not the man to look with jealousy at a religious creed whose moral

system was so near his own, though the foundations on which it stood were so unlike. Nor is there much evidence of "the narrow malignance of his fellow-Stoics," by which he is thought to have been probably incited.[1] It is true that the name of Rusticus, his early teacher, does appear as that of the magistrate who tried and sentenced Justin, but the action of the judge was mainly formal, and there is little trace of personal rancour, though his tone may sound contemptuous in dealing with professions which he could not understand.[2]

Justin himself had donned the mantle of the sage, and passed through all the schools in turn as a seeker after wisdom, but though he spoke of the earlier philosophers as taught by the inspiration of the Word, he may well have stirred the jealousy of those whose partial knowledge he refuted, and who, like the Cynic Crescens whom we read of, may have hounded on the populace against him. There is, indeed, a strange coincidence of language which may point to some knowledge on the emperor's part of the "Second Apology" of Justin. He speaks of the soul which should be ready at any moment to be parted from the body, "not from mere obstinacy, as with the Christians, but considerately and with dignity and in a way to persuade another, without tragic show (ἀτραγῴδως)". It has been thought that this contains a reference to the wish expressed by Justin that some one would

[1] Sir A. Grant, "Oxford Essays," 1858, p. 119.
[2] Ruinart, "Acta Martyrum Selecta."

cry aloud with tragic voice (τραγικῇ τῇ φωνῇ) and denounce the iniquity of heathen judges.[1]

It is, perhaps, a still more startling fancy which ascribes the emperor's course of action in this matter to the influence of Jewish prejudice and rancour.

The Talmud speaks of intercourse between one of the Antonines and the greatest rabbi of the age, Jehuda-ha-Nasi, and illustrates in many ways the marked respect which the Roman ruler showed to the great teacher of the Synagogue. A learned treatise has been written to prove that the Antoninus of the Talmud could be no other than the Marcus Aurelius with whom we are concerned.[2] Josephus certainly had noted the general similarity between the moral systems of the Pharisees and Stoics, both of which tried to reconcile the doctrine of divine predestination with the fact of man's free-will. The argument itself is full of interest, but the links are far too weak to bear the strain of any inferences from them, and it would be unjust alike to the saintly Jehuda and the dispassionate Antoninus to suppose that any personal influence was in this way brought to bear against the Christians. The Jews of Smyrna might be busy in the popular excitement which was fatal to the life of Polycarp; Justin's death might possibly be due to bitter feelings stirred by controversy with the Stoics and the Jews; but we have no right to

[1] "Second Apol." c. xii.; cf. Prof. Plumptre, "Contemp. Review," 1869, p. 83.

[2] Dr. Arnold Bodek, "Marcus Aurelius als Freund und Zeitgenosse des Rabbi Jehuda-ha-Nasi, 1868."

impute unworthy motives on such poor evidence as this, or to ascribe to noble spirits the petty malignity of meaner natures. But the legal aspect of the question had been ruled by Trajan long ago when Pliny asked for guidance as a judge; his answer put the Church under the ban, and his successors acted on the precedent so set, though like him they had no wish to encourage informers to hunt down their victims. The Imperial government looked with jealous eyes at all the corporate unions which might prove the centres of conspiracy against the State; unless founded with its sanction they were treated as secret societies beyond the pale of law, and, strange as it may seem to us, the Christian Church was often regarded with suspicion as a dangerous and anti-social movement. Its dogmas roused no opposition, for they were little known to statesmen or to princes; its high ideal was hidden from the wise and prudent, and revealed only unto babes; but its little brotherhoods were springing into life in every land, and spreading their influence men knew not how or where. Whatever the secret of its force, the potent leaven was working from below, while the network of its hierarchy seemed to envelope every class. They professed, indeed, obedience to the ruling powers, but their loyalty was not beyond suspicion. They had no love for the soldier's life, and shrunk from all official pledges and all the observances of public life on which the stamp of the state idolatry was set; they were heard to speak of a higher rule than that of Cæsar, and of the blasphemy of the divine honours

paid to man; they seemed at times to push their courage to defiance in the hot wish to win the martyr's crown. They were thought to be churlish and morose, for they could not take a part in the merry-makings of their neighbours, associated as these were with the symbols and practices of a false religion. For themselves they had no image in their homes or chapels, and they were therefore branded as atheists by ignorant dislike. Wild stories spread of all the horrors of their secret meetings; how they joined in sensual revelry, and shed the blood of murdered innocents, till the outraged gods marked their displeasure by some scourge of pestilence or flood or fire.

The thunderclouds of popular frenzy burst out here and there in fierce explosions when the peoples rose against the Christians in wild tumult, and hurried them with vengeful cries before the governor or judge. There was little to be proved, indeed, against them but the membership in an illegal sect and the seeming bigotry with which they clung to their profession. The magistrates did not always credit the wild charges brought against them, nightmare shapes as they were of vulgar fancy, but still the Christian society, with its organized unity and widespread members, with its notorious dislike to the institutions of the age and its prophecies of speedy change, naturally seemed to worldly eyes like a permanent menace to the established order. When the barbarians were on the move, and every man was needed to defend the frontiers, the vital forces of society were weak-

ened by the austere sectaries who stood aloof from the service of the State, and seemed to reserve their loyalty and zeal for the spread of a mystic brotherhood whose homage was not paid to an earthly Cæsar, and whose New Jerusalem eclipsed the majesty of Rome. Apologists, indeed, might find it easy to disprove the calumnies of ignorant malice, might even in the boldness of their innocence appeal to the equity of the emperor himself, but the cares of government tasked all his powers, and even the wise and gentle Antonines probably accepted the current prejudices of the ruling classes, and neglected to look deeper into the real doctrines of the Church with which they had so much unconscious sympathy of spirit. To these causes may be apparently ascribed the startling paradox of persecution raging in the age and with the sanction of the most tolerant and large-hearted Cæsars of the Roman Empire.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE STOIC CREED AND TEMPER IN RELATION TO OTHER ASPECTS OF THOUGHT.

THE foregoing pages have been occupied almost exclusively with the moral aspect of the Stoic system, in which all its real force and originality was centered. It only remains to gather up in a concluding chapter some remarks on its relations to other departments of social thought and progress. It confronted the Christian Church, as we have seen, as a rival influence, appealing chiefly to the pride and self-control of resolute natures, though turning at last to preach, as Lactantius observes, even to women and to slaves,[1] but with no balm for stricken consciences, or gospel of consolation for the weak. The Church, therefore, borrowed nothing from it at the first, except perhaps a technical phrase or two and illustrations, which point either to the commonplaces of the schools or to an attitude of conscious opposition. To the first class may be ascribed the psychological division of man's nature into body, soul, and spirit, which appears in slightly different forms in Marcus Aurelius and St. Paul; or, again, the

[1] Lactantius, "Instit. Div.," iii. 23.

quotation from Cleanthes or Aratus in the famous speech delivered on Mars Hill at Athens.[1] To the latter belong the possible references in St. Paul's Epistles to the ideal of the sage and the citizen of the world at large, which Bishop Lightfoot has suggested, and which may be best given in his words. The Stoic sage "alone is free, he alone is happy; he alone is beautiful. He, and he alone, possesses absolute wealth. He is the true king and the true priest. Now, may we not say that this image has suggested many expressions to the Apostle of the Gentiles? 'Even now ye are full,'[2] he exclaims in impassioned irony to the Corinthians; 'even now are ye rich, even now are ye made kings without us; we are fools for Christ, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are glorious, but we are dishonoured.'[3] 'All things are yours,' he says elsewhere, 'all things are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's.'[4] So, too, he describes himself and the other Apostles, 'as being grieved, yet always rejoicing; as beggars, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.'[5] 'In everything at every time having every self-sufficiency . . . in everything enriched.'[6] 'I have learnt,' he says again, 'in what soever circumstances I am, to be self-sufficing. I have all strength in Him that giveth me power. I have all things to the full and to overflowing.'[7]

[1] Ἐκ σοῦ γὰρ γένος ἐσμέν (Acts xvii. 28).
[2] 1 Cor. iv. 8. [3] Ibid. iv. 10. [4] Ibid. iii. 22.
[5] 2 Cor. vi. 10. [6] Ibid. ix. 8, 11. [7] Phil. iv. 11, 13, 18.

"This universal dominion . . . is promised alike by the Stoic philosopher to the wise man and by the Christian Apostle to the believer. But the one must attain it by self-isolation, the other by incorporation. It is ἐν τῷ ἐνδυναμοῦντι (in Him that giveth power) that the faithful becomes all-sufficient. All things are his; but they are only his, in so far as he is Christ's, and because Christ is God's. Here, and here only, the Apostle found the realization of the proud ideal which the chief philosophers of his native Tarsus had sketched in such bold outline and painted in these brilliant colours."

The same writer also points to the passages which seem to bear the traces of the Stoic images of the great commonwealth of which all men are members. "Our citizenship is in heaven."[1] "God raised us with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus."[2] "Therefore ye are no more strangers and sojourners, but fellow-citizens with the saints and members of God's household."[3] "Fulfil your duties as citizens worthily of the Gospel of Christ."[4] "We being many are one body in Christ, and members one of another."[5] "For as the body is one and hath many members, and all the members of the body being many are one body, so also is Christ; for we all are baptized in one Spirit into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free."[6] "There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither

[1] Phil. iii. 20. [2] Ephes. ii. 6. [3] Ibid. ii. 19.
[4] Phil. i. 27. [5] Rom. xii. 5. [6] 1 Cor. xii. 12.

bond nor free ; there is no male and female ; for ye all are one in Christ Jesus."[1]

With reference to this cosmopolitan ideal it has been well said by another writer :—"The city of God, of which the Stoics doubtfully and feebly spoke, was now set up before the eyes of men. It was no unsubstantial city such as we fancy in the clouds, no invisible pattern such as Plato thought might be laid up in heaven, but a visible corporation whose members met together to eat bread and drink wine, and into which they were initiated by bodily immersion in water. Here the Gentile met the Jew whom he had been accustomed to regard as an enemy of the human race ; the Roman met the lying Greek sophist, the Syrian slave, the gladiator born beside the Danube. In brotherhood they met, the natural birth and kindred of each forgotten, the baptism alone remembered in which they had been born again to God and to each other."[2]

In the next age some of the most cultivated of the Christian converts passed into the Church through the portals of philosophy, and like Justin, still put on the Stoic mantle, holding that the Word which had become flesh and dwelt awhile on earth, had been the source of spiritual light in earlier ages, and that Socrates and other earnest seekers after truth had been in some sense unconscious Christians as in communion with the Eternal Word. It was thus that

[1] Gal. iii. 28.

[2] "Ecce Homo," p. 136 ; cf. Lightfoot, St. Paul's Ep. to Philippians.

Clemens of Alexandria maintained that God had made three covenants with men, in heathen philosophy, and Jewish law, and Christian Gospel. When the gloom and vigour of asceticism brooded over Christian society at the break-up of the old Roman world, it was remembered that no system had insisted like the Stoic on the vanity of earthly pleasures, and the soul's power to rise above the entanglements of sense to the fruition of the absolute and the divine. Men read the doctrine of original corruption in Seneca's complaints of universal folly, and tempered the pride of Stoic self-restraint with the yearnings of penitence and self-abasement.

There was much to attract and little to offend in the Manual of Epictetus and the thoughts of Antoninus; men forgot the essential difference that lay below the outward features of resemblance, while apocryphal documents and letters gave a substantial shape to the floating fancies that Seneca must have known and loved St. Paul, and that Marcus Aurelius must have publicly professed his reverent regard for the Christian Faith.

But Stoicism as a system had by this time passed away; its definite outlines had been long since softened or effaced, and various forms of mysticism, claiming to be sprung from the Platonic thought, were the only powers that kept the field as rivals to the Christian Church.

To science and to abstract thought the contributions of the Stoics were of little value. They mapped out, indeed, the world of knowledge into the three de-

partments of ethic, logic, and physic, and though they centered their interest and energy upon the first, they were far from neglecting the two others. It is true that Ariston of Chios, Zenon's pupil, compared logic to a spider's web, which is as useless as it is curious; and likened those who studied it to people eating lobsters, who took much trouble for the sake of a little morsel sheltered in its fence of shell. Natural science he regarded as an ambitious effort to transcend the limits of our human powers, and likely therefore to bear little fruit. Yet others of the school were not deterred from much intellectual activity in these directions, though if we looked only to the value of the results which they obtained, we might feel inclined to sympathize with the pessimism of Ariston. Logic they regarded in the light of the egg's shell, or the wall of a city or a garden, because it might help to guard the truth from rude assaults, but they could add nothing of solid use to the analysis of the formal processes of thought which Aristotle had already made, and could only multiply fine-drawn distinctions and subtleties of grammatical nomenclature. In dealing with the fundamental question of the standard or criterion of truth, they formulated a sort of philosophy of common sense, which may remind us of some later systems, such as those of Locke or Reid.

Sensation is the only source of all our knowledge; the soul is a blank leaf, sensation is the hand which covers it with writing. From the memory of our perceptions we pass onward to experience and general notions (*προλήψεις, κοιναὶ ἔννοιαι*), out of which

knowledge is built up; but the difference between sensation and knowledge is one only of degree, depending on the strength of our conviction. For Zenon compared sensation to the outstretched fingers, assent to the closing hand, conviction to the fist, and knowledge to one fist grasped firmly by the other. Some of our perceptions carry with them an irresistible conviction of the truth; they not only represent external facts, but they make us grasp them as it were in immediate apprehension, and warrant our belief in their reality (*καταληπτικὴ φαντασία*), and so enable us to negative the scepticism which despairs of truth (*ἀκαταληψία*). The simplicity and bareness of these logical positions were disguised by the dialectical acuteness of Chrysippus, who did most to spread the use of the barren subtleties and thorny quibbles which Seneca so harshly criticises in his fellow Stoics, though he condescends at times to show his expertness in such weapons of debate.

In connection with the theory of knowledge given above, they held that the only realities were bodily objects; virtues and vices, thoughts, emotions, day and night and seasons, were material beings, for matter only can be acted on or act.

They went beyond this to reproduce, though not consciously perhaps, the views of the much earlier thinker Heraclitus, in regarding a fiery ether as the primary element which passes by successive changes into the four elements which are known to sense; while it is one with the universal reason, and with the soul of man, which is his dæmon. Like him

they spoke of destiny as the law of the whole universe, and of alternate phases of creation and of conflagration in the eternal flux of natural causes. There is little distinctly original in these cosmical assumptions, though with all their crudeness of materialism they rounded off their pantheistic system in a manner which deeply impressed the imagination of the world, and stoutly maintained the doctrine of free-will, although they seemed to sacrifice it to their theories of natural necessity and divine predestination.

Nor had the Stoics much to add to what was known already or believed in any of the special branches of physical inquiry. We read of treatises, indeed, by Posidonius and others on such questions, but their contents, as far as they are known to us, seem based on Aristotle's Physics. There is a work of Seneca's which deals with questions of natural philosophy, but the treatment is rhetorical and careless, disfigured by credulity in the supposed facts which it records, as by onesidedness and prejudice in its conclusions. But still there is a feature which may impress us as we read his writings on such subjects, and which is strikingly contrasted with the temper of the Greeks from whom he mainly drew, and that is the enthusiasm with which he dwells upon the intellectual wealth which had been already won, combined with the large hopefulness of future progress. To Aristotle it had seemed that arts, discoveries, and knowledge were all found and lost in turn as the cycle of the universe came round, but Seneca speaks in quite

another strain in passages like these which we may quote :—"Why do we wonder that comets, so rare a phenomenon, have not yet had their laws assigned? That we should know so little of their beginning and their end, when their recurrence is at wide intervals? It is not yet fifteen hundred years since Greece reckoned the stars and gave them names. There are still many nations which are acquainted with the heavens by sight only, which do not yet know why the moon disappears, why she is eclipsed. It is but lately that among us philosophy has reduced these matters to a certainty. The day shall come when the course of time and the labour of a maturer age shall bring to light what is yet concealed. One generation, even if it devoted itself to the skies, is not enough for researches so extensive. How then can it be so, when we divide this scanty allowance of years into no equal shares between our studies and our vices? These things then must be explained by a long succession of inquiries. We have but just begun to know how arise the morning and evening appearances, the stations, the progressions, and the retrogradations of the fixed stars which put themselves in our way, which appearing perpetually in another and another place compel us to be curious. Some one will hereafter demonstrate in what region the comets wander, why they move so far asunder from the rest, of what size and nature they are. Let us be content with what we have discovered, let posterity contribute its share to truth."[1]

[1] "Quest. Nat." vii. 25.

And again:—"Let us not wonder that what lies so deep is brought out so slowly. How many animals have become known for the first time in this age! And the members of future generations shall know many of which we are ignorant. Many things are reserved for ages to come, when our memory shall have passed away. The world would be a small thing, indeed, if it did not contain matter of inquiry for all the world. Eleusis reserves something for the second visit of the worshipper. So, too, Nature does not at once disclose all her mysteries. We think ourselves initiated: we are but in the vestibule. The arcana are not thrown open without distinction and without reserve. This age will see some things, that which comes after us others."[1]

With these prophecies of future progress we may naturally connect the visions, one day to be realized, of new worlds to be discovered beyond the bounds of ocean, far remoter even from the Roman ken than Western Thule, such as Seneca's drama of "Medea" brings before us with singular vividness and force:—

> "Venient annis secula seris
> Quibus oceanus vincula rerum
> Laxet, et ingens pateat tellus,
> Tethysque novos deteget orbes,
> Nec sit terris ultima Thule."

To legal studies the contributions of the Stoics were far more important, but they consisted more in

[1] "Quest. Nat." vii. 30, 31; cf. Whewell, "Phil. of Inductive Sciences," ii. 139.

the informing spirit, than in any definite conceptions which were borrowed. The schools of Greece had long ago insisted on a law of nature, distinct from the conventional usages of different lands and ages. The Stoics took up the phrase almost as a commonplace, but laid a special emphasis upon it, and made it the key-note of their moral system, as a guide to theory and rule for practice in all the departments of man's action. The great jurists of the Empire were familiar with the training of the schools, and they saw in the law of nature an ideal of simplicity and universal truth for the legal student and reformer. Some rudiments of this they found already in the principles which lay beneath the prætor's edicts, intended for the aliens to whom the strict Roman usages of family rights and property could not apply, and for whose benefit the magistrates had fallen back on general maxims, common, as it was thought, to a supposed Law of Nations (*jus gentium*), but needing his sanction to be binding as a set of positive enactments. The rules handed on from one prætor to another, expanded and systematized as time went on, came into existence solely to supply the shortcomings of the civil law, in dealing with the cases to which that could not be with strict propriety applied. They were drawn from the supposed law of nations, as an element common to all human codes; they were thought to be based upon a law of nature rather than the accidents of race, and age, and country; they became a sort of equity, corrective of the earlier inelastic forms. The precedent so

set was followed steadily by the great lawyers, who gave coherent and articulate expression to the imperial codes; from the prevalent system of philosophy they drew, perhaps unconsciously, strong phrases about natural justice, and endeavoured by definition and analogy, and methods of interpreta tion, to infuse an animating spirit into the dry formalisms of the past, and to bring the statute law into more and more of harmony with their ideal. They did not carry this so far, indeed, as might have been expected, and the contrasts are often very marked between the abstract principles as stated in preambles of the Digest, and the practical details which regulate the different sides of social action. But they were not theorists alone, but men of action forced to take account of the temper of the age and the forces of resistance: not philosophers dealing with imaginary beings, but statesmen hampered by historic data, and the prejudices of the masses and the partial enlightenment of men in power. They had, therefore, to tolerate much that was inconsistent with their cardinal maxims of human equality and universal brotherhood and the commonwealth of nations. "Gaius, Ulpian, Papinian, and Paulus," it has been said, "appear very timid by the side of Seneca and Epictetus."[1] But the influence of the Stoic theory might still be very real, though we must allow for the constant force of friction. Christianity found much to do in breathing a larger and humaner spirit

[1] Denis, "Idées Morales dans l'Antiquité;" ap. Sir A. Grant, p. 121.

into the various relations of society as defined by civil law, but it was no slight help to it in its reforming work that principles so true and so wide-reaching had been uttered with authority already in the Roman codes, and held up thereby to the reverence of later ages.

Among the severe comments of an eminent divine already cited, we may read that Stoicism died out, having produced during its short lifetime only very transient and partial effects; and that rigorous and unflinching as was the system in its principles and heroic in its proportions, the direct results were marvellously little. "It was a staff of professors without classes. It produced, or at least attracted, a few isolated great men, but on the life of the masses and on the policy of states it was almost wholly powerless."[1] A modern jurist, on the other hand, affirms that with the single exception of Christianity no form of belief ever took possession of so great a number of Europeans, or held it so long; and that it moulded human institutions and affected human destiny to a greater extent than all the other philosophical systems either of the ancient or the modern world.[2] The latter seems the truer estimate, though as the point of view is different it may be possible to accept them both with some reserves. Stoicism had a religious philosophy indeed, but was not an organized religion, and was too severely abstract to touch the heart and the

[1] Bishop Lightfoot, "App. to St. Paul's Ep. to the Philipp."
[2] Lorimer, "Institutes of Law," p. 116.

imagination of the people. Its direct influence on the lower classes probably was very slight, though the Cynic missionaries spread some knowledge of its principles in coarser forms. It was otherwise with the higher and the middle classes, but even here it is not easy to give definite proofs or apply material tests. In dealing with societies that have outward symbols of communion we may be able to count the numbers and appraise some positive results, but how are we to measure the influence of a spiritual leaven working in the midst of a complex social system, with countless forces of attraction and repulsion all around it. The literature, whether grave or gay, of the early Roman Empire abundantly attests its popularity and wide diffusion. Under the Antonines it reigned supreme as a rule of life among the higher circles. It stamped itself ineffaceably upon the language of the civil law; it gave a tone to earnest thought on moral questions; it set an example of resolute self-control which became one at least of the moving forces of the age, and provided in the homely talk of Epictetus a manual in constant use in serious households. What more it might have done we cannot say, for the Christian Church was ready by that time to take up its work from the far higher vantage-ground of an organized society, with a personal ideal and a new spirit of enthusiastic service. The new-comer had already all that was of vital efficacy in the Stoic creed, together with fresh elements to which heathen philosophy could not of itself attain. But Stoicism still lived on, though we

cannot always trace its influence, or distinguish the several currents in their course. It lost its essential features, we are told, meantime, while it passed away in the dissolving view of mystic fancy. It may be so, but with its rigorous logic it dropped much of its pride, its hardness, and its airs of paradox; and the moral temper which survived passed into new forms, while the old system crumbled to decay.

The influence of this Stoic temper may be traced in the Jewish Philo and the School of Alexandria, deepening their scorn of sensual indulgence, while perhaps it encouraged the pride of intellectual isolation, but providing at any rate a solid resting-point of moral propaganda among all the reveries of transcendental speculation; and though the later philosophies of the old heathen world called themselves commonly by other names, yet they gathered up what was true and vital in the lessons and examples of the Stoic system. In later times it is hard, if not impossible, to trace with certainty the intermingling currents which flowed from the schools and from the Church, but we may note that in the "Consolation" of Boëthius, while there is no sure evidence of Christian thought, the Stoic elements are present unmistakeably. The writer, in the words of Gibbon, was "the last of the Romans whom Cato or Tully would have acknowledged for their fellow-countryman."[1] The work itself was read, perhaps, more largely in succeeding centuries than any other legacy

[1] Gibbon, chap. xxix.

of pagan thought, and was the starting-point of a whole literature in which the same thoughts were repeated with countless varieties of form. The doctrines of the Porch contributed in this way probably to the ascetic and chivalrous ideals which formed of themselves so large a part of the thought and action of the Middle Ages, and if we cannot always trace their presence in the sentiments of modern Europe, the reason may be that spiritual, like gaseous, forces intermingle freely as by natural law. At the Renaissance, indeed, when enthusiastic scholars turned back anew to the old classic models and revived the spirit of the bygone past, each of the old systems of philosophy lived once more awhile in the devotion of a few adherents, and the Stoic system, among others, found its champions and exponents, such as Justus Lipsius, who carried his sympathy so far, as not only in his commentaries upon Tacitus to break out into rapturous admiration when the last hours of Thrasea are recorded, but even in his private letters to sanction the εὔλογος ἐξαγωγή of the school, or the voluntary exit from the world in face of hopelessly untoward conditions.[1] But such unlovely elements of the old pagan alloy were purged away, while the noble spirit lived on in other shapes, and took service in the Christian Church.

Some measure of that temper may be surely found in the Calvinism of the Reformation, with its austere

[1] J. Lipsii, "Epist. Cent." ii. 26.

morality and the unbending rigour of its abstract principles, and high theories of divine foreknowledge coupled with the practical insistence on the facts of man's freewill. The first essay with which its author, Calvin, began his literary labours, was a commentary on Seneca's treatise upon "Clemency;" and Geneva, the scene of his life's work, has been called by Michelet "the spiritual city built up of Stoicism upon the rock of predestination."

The same temper reappeared again in pagan dress at the close of the last century in France, where revolutionary spirits, turning impatiently from what they thought the lower ideals of Catholicism, sought for a rule of life in heathen ethics, and nursed their fancy with the pictures of the stern old republicans of Cato's type, or martyrs of conscience and of liberty like Thrasea Pætus. It was but a sorry parody, indeed, performed with most unlovely strut and declamation, in which the actors hardly entered into the spirit of the system which they copied, but thought chiefly of the accidents and outward forms. To some of them, like Rousseau, the nature that they hankered after was a fond fiction of the fancy, a supposed ideal of man's innocence when wants were few and instincts healthy, and the luxuries of civilized refinement all unknown.

It was in a far other sense that a moralist of our own country, Bishop Butler, reverted to the old Stoic rule of following nature; like the doctors of the Porch he held that man should be a law unto himself, and that, as in a well-ordered state, the well-

being of every part depends on the harmony and balance of the whole.

But two corrections seemed required to reconcile the ancient standard to the claims of common sense, and both were therefore urged by Bishop Butler. The first was to eschew the paradox of apathy, which treated the emotions like hostile powers to be repressed, rather than natural impulses to be guided and controlled. The next was to invert the argument of the Stoic optimists, who urged that as God's providential government must needs be perfect, and man's happiness must depend on the virtue which lies within his power, it follows that virtue alone is a real good, while pain, privation, and disgrace, though seeming evils, are not real. But the Christian divine maintained, that as the present life is often not a perfect whole which satisfies our sense of justice, it leads our faith onward to a life beyond the grave, where the seeming inequalities of our lot may be redressed, and a sublimer justice done to all mankind. Yet even with these cautions and reserves, the rule, so modernized, has not been safe from critical attack. Of such we may content ourselves with two examples, quite different as they are in source and meaning. The first expresses in satiric style the perplexity of common sense, that would have a simple rule to guide it, and knows not how to deal with general theories and vague abstractions. Thus we read in the "Rasselas" of Dr. Johnson the philosopher's sonorous maxims:—"'The way to be happy is to live according to nature, in obedience to that

universal and unalterable law with which every heart is originally impressed . . . He that lives according to nature will suffer nothing from the delusions of hope, or importunities of desire; he will receive and reject with equability of temper; and act or suffer as the reason of things shall alternately prescribe. Other men may amuse themselves with subtle definitions or intricate ratiocinations. Let them learn to be wise by easier means; let them observe the hind of the forest, and the linnet of the grove; let them consider the life of animals whose motions are regulated by instinct; they obey their guide and be happy.' . . . . When he had spoken, he looked round him with a placid air and enjoyed the consciousness of his own beneficence. 'Sir,' said the prince, with great modesty, 'as I, like all the rest of mankind, am desirous of felicity, my closest attention has been fixed upon your discourse: I doubt not the truth of a position which a man so learned has so confidently advanced. Let me only know what it is to live according to nature.' 'When I find young men so humble and so docile,' said the philosopher, 'I can deny them no information which my studies have enabled me to afford. To live according to nature is to act always with due regard to the fitness arising from the relations and qualities of causes and effects; to concur with the great and unchangeable scheme of universal felicity; to co-operate with the general disposition and tendency of the present system of things.'"

The prince soon found that this was one of the

sages whom he should understand less as he heard him longer. He therefore bowed and was silent; and the philosopher, supposing him satisfied and the rest vanquished, rose up and departed with the air of a man that had co-operated with the present system." [1]

The criticism needs, perhaps, no serious answer, as it might be urged with little variation of detail against all attempts at scientific treatment, where abstractions take the place of concrete rules.

The second comes from quite another quarter—from Sir Alexander Grant, the Aristotelian scholar, who complains that the analysis has not been carried far enough to give the rule a definite and scientific value. The objection may be stated best in his own language:—"Into the difficulties of the question Butler has not entered. For instance, while he is perfectly successful in establishing against the Hobbists the reality of the moral element in man's nature, he does not tell us whether or not he would agree with the Stoics in ultimately giving the entire supremacy to a man's reason and conscience, so as to supplant the other instincts, or at what point he would stop. . . . Is the life of the saints and martyrs to be called a life according to nature? If not, is it better or worse? and if better, is not man to aim at the better? There is one mode of representation which describes life as a progress, a conflict, a good fight; another which makes it the following of nature. On the one hand, there is the spirit of aspiration and effort, the tendency to

[1] Chap. 22.

asceticism, the victory of the will; on the other hand, there are the genial, kindly, human feelings; there is the wise passivity of mind; there is the breadth of sympathy which counterbalances an over-concentrated intensity of aim. To make the formula, "Live according to nature," of any value we require to have these conflicting tendencies harmonized with each other."[1]

To this train of reasoning a recent writer has given what he thinks to be not only the Socratic, but the Christian answer, and with this we may be content, perhaps, to leave the subject. "'The spirit of aspiration and effort' is not opposed to 'the genial, kindly, human feelings,' nor to 'the breadth of sympathy' of which he speaks. 'The progress, the conflict, the good fight' is an effort not by an external power to drive Nature from her course, or even to control her activity, but by Nature herself, as revealed to us internally and externally, to vindicate her supremacy over the denaturalizing influences, over the rebellious subjects within her own realm, which oppose her free development and harmonious action. When the conflict is peculiarly hard, when the external principle of disorder has succeeded in ranging the animal and sensual against the rational and spiritual propensities, and when Nature herself, as a whole, is in danger of being degraded from a human nature into something worse than a brute nature, she calls—and in the case of saints and martyrs calls not in vain—for aid from above.

[1] "Oxford Essays," p. 90.

"But it is for aid; not for her destruction, but for her preservation and support; it is that she may become not less herself, but more herself, in this her hour of trial—and that, in her triumph, she may save, not the higher principles alone from degradation, but very often, also, the lower propensities, 'the law in the members,' from self-destruction by excess of present gratification.

"The whole effort of the will, when directed to the realization of the higher life, is an effort not against Nature, but in favour of Nature, in every sense that can be attached to that word, except the single, and even if true, surely very narrow sense of it, in which it is taken to mean the tendency to the unbridled indulgence of one or more of our irrational appetites. 'Man,' says Kant, 'is unholy enough, but the humanity inhabiting his person (his proper person) must be holy."[1]

[1] Professor Lorimer's "Institutes of Law," p. 158.

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